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Mr. Nathan, who is the authority on the American theatre and drama for the *Encyclopædia Britannica* and the *Britannica Book of the Year*, has published the following books on the subjects:

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*Art of the Night*  
*The House of Satan*  
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*Comedians All*  
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The Theatre Book of the Year

1945  1946



# The THEATRE Book

## OF THE YEAR

1945 ✧ 1946

*A Record and an Interpretation*

B Y

GEORGE JEAN NATHAN

ALFRED



A. KNOPF

NEW YORK : 1946

THIS IS

*a Borzoi Book, published by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.*



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FIRST EDITION

## Foreword

THE FOLLOWING play by play chapters, together with the supplementary comment, will, I hope, provide a critical over-all picture of the theatrical season here considered. From them may be deduced that season's highlights and lowlights and, in sum, its relative status in the records.

Among the elements that figured in additional directions was, first, the increased activity of the Equity Library Theatres. These were launched two seasons ago by Mr. John Golden, the Broadway producer, who generously contributed funds toward giving the young and unknown members of the Actors' Equity Association an opportunity to demonstrate their talents on the small stages of twelve public libraries in the metropolitan area. A great variety of plays served the novices, several of whom gave such favorable accounts of themselves that they were drafted into the professional ranks. Among the wide range of dramatists presented were Goethe, Ibsen, Schiller, Massinger, Heijermans, Pinero, Wilde, Maugham, Coward, and Priestley, along with divers Americans.

Secondly, set dubiously in motion were a number of repertory projects, both white and Negro. The latter collapsed after a single offering, *Arsenic And Old Lace*, exposed in a theatre in the outskirts of Harlem and, in the case of another plan with the City Center in mind, before even that much. The former were repertory in advertisement only. The organization calling itself Theatre Incorporated grandiosely announced the institution of the scheme, but ventured nothing after a box-office success with Shaw's *Pygmalion*. (As a substitute, it imported in May the Old Vic repertory company from England.) The Theatre



## Foreword

Guild's Shakespearean repertory company began with a poorly handled production of *The Winter's Tale* and followed it with a road production of *The Merry Wives Of Windsor*, with an altered company, which was not displayed in New York. Cheryl Crawford, Margaret Webster and Eva Le Gallienne preferred to wait until next season with their long heralded American Repertory Theatre. And several other announcements remained, at least for the time being, merely announcements.

Every now and then the mails bring in from one such ambitious group or another similar flamboyant prospect concerning the establishment of a theatre, either in New York or in one of the thitherward cities, devoted to repertory, the repertory to be devoted in turn to revivals, in addition to the classics, of successful plays of the past. It is not a bad idea, but I have an equally good if not better one that I commend to any group that can obtain the necessary money. It is this: the institution of a repertory theatre for the revival, in addition to the classics, of failures of the past which did not deserve failure and which frequently were and still remain superior to the plays that achieved success.

Some of the critically most interesting nights in the history of our theatre have been provided by such failures, just as some of the least have been provided by some of the biggest financial successes. It would certainly take a hearty moron to argue, for example, that George Birmingham's *General John Regan* did not constitute an infinitely better theatrical occasion in every respect than some such success as the popularly (and here and there even critically) esteemed *They Knew What They Wanted*, the Sidney Howard Pulitzer Prize play. Or an equally matchless half-wit to contend that Denis Johnson's *The Moon In The Yellow River* was not more worthy in every way than some such success as Anderson's *The Star-Wagon*, Rice's *Counsellor-at-Law*, Behrman's *Biography*, or Odets' *Golden Boy*.

The late Julian Mitchell, one of the best known dance directors of his day, who staged the numbers for, among many others, the Weber-Fields Music Hall shows, was stone-deaf. In order to get the rhythms of the music for

the dances it was consequently his custom to sit atop the piano upon which at rehearsals the composer played the tunes, in this manner sensing them from his physical vibrations. One day he jumped off the piano in a rage and protested to the composer that his tunes smelled to high heaven. To which the composer blandly retorted, "My dear Mitchell, I write music for the ear, not the behind."

In the same way we are sometimes brought to believe that the authors of certain successful plays have written them with that portion of the public in mind which is collectively to be described by the more vulgar synonym for the section of the anatomy alluded to by Mitchell's critic. The ear music of a failure like Sean O'Casey's *Within The Gates* thus was and is immeasurably more captivating, and the play with all its faults more impressive, than the Tin Pan Alley seat-stirring racket of some large popular success of remoter years like Sheldon's *Salvation Nell* or of more recent like Hellman's *The Searching Wind*.

The seventeen plays of the modern American theatre which have achieved the longest legitimate New York runs are the following: *Tobacco Road*, *Abie's Irish Rose*, *You Can't Take It With You*, *Life With Father*, *Arsenic And Old Lace*, *Lightnin'*, *Angel Street*, *The Bat*, *My Sister Eileen*, *White Cargo*, *Three Men On A Horse*, *The First Year*, *The Man Who Came To Dinner*, *Claudia*, *Junior Miss*, *Seventh Heaven*, and *Peg o' My Heart*.

Compare them as to any real critical quality with these seventeen plays in the same period which have been dire failures: *A Texas Nightingale*, *He*, *A Highland Fling*, *A Sound Of Hunting*, *The Beautiful People*, *The Last Night Of Don Juan*, *The Silver Tassie*, *The Commodore Marries*, *Mozart*, *The White-Headed Boy*, *Katie Roche*, *Goat Alley*, *Star Spangled*, *Outrageous Fortune*, *Daughters of Atreus*, *Murder In The Cathedral*, and *A Distant Drum*.

I not long ago wrote that the future of our theatre lay in the storehouse. Allowing for the obvious exaggeration, there is still a measure of truth in it, for it seems to be our theatre's fate that many of the most deserving plays, both imported and domestic, shown in it are soon carted off to

a dusty grave. And not only with plays but even on occasion with musical shows, though that does not happen to be our immediate subject. It is thus that a beautiful show like *Jumbo* and a genuinely superior one like Vincent Youman's *Rainbow* die a commercial death, while sadly inferior ones like the *Are You With Its?* and the *Bloomer Girls* run on and on and make fortunes from a paramusiac proletariat.

My suggested repertory company would have a mine of valuable failures to dig from. In it it would find, among many others, plays like Hauptmann's *The Sunken Bell*, Stephen Phillips' *Herod*, Porto-Riche's *L'Amoureuse*, Pirandello's *As You Desire Me* and Brieux's *The Incubus*, along with such items as Rita Wellman's *The Gentile Wife*, Turner's *The Man Who Ate The Popomack*, Saroyan's *Love's Old Sweet Song*, etc., etc. The list might be prolonged to the point of reader tedium.

It is not infrequently the case that a dramatist's better plays fail and his poorer succeed. Pinero's *The Wife Without A Smile* collapsed quickly from lack of patronage whereas his relatively much inferior comedy, *Trelawney Of The Wells*, prospered greatly. And his *The Thunderbolt* failed ignominiously while such of his lesser plays as *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, *Iris*, et al. scored large popular successes. Molnár's *The Glass Slipper* could not achieve the box-office popularity of his *The Play's The Thing*; nor did Barrie's *The Legend Of Leonora* ever get within box-office hailing distance of even his *The Little Minister*, which could in no way be regarded as its critical equal. There are all kinds of such examples. Among our own playwrights, Zoë Akins' before-mentioned *A Texas Nightingale* went to the storehouse while her inferior *Declassé* and *The Greeks Had A Word For It* flourished; Elmer Rice's *Left Bank* failed whereas his *On Trial* was enormously successful; Rose Franken's *Outrageous Fortune*, a really nutritious play, got only a short distance while her *Soldier's Wife* drew the crowds; and Vincent Lawrence's *Among The Married* did small business while his *In Love With Love* did at least enough to call for a

subsequent revival. George M. Cohan's *Pigeons And People*, one of his best plays, was poorly received and success contributed instead to such lesser ones as *Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford* and *Hit-the-Trail Halliday*. Raphaelson's *Jason* is at least ten times better from a critical viewpoint than his *Accent On Youth* but not, apparently, in the estimation of the public. Edwin Justus Mayer's *Children Of Darkness* went down the chute in favor of his *The Firebrand*. Arthur Richman's *A Proud Woman* failed whereas his *The Awful Truth* did not. Lynn Starling's *Weak Sisters* got nowhere, but his *Meet The Wife* covered some distance. And so on.

There is another idea I venture for any such repertory company. Good plays are frequently rejected by our professional theatre managers and producers because, though they allow that they like them, they feel that their runs would be too short to return sufficient funds to guarantee them against loss. Let my suggested company, for which the gamble would be much smaller, put on these meritorious plays which the aforesaid gentlemen have been afraid to. As a starter, I offer Donnay's excellent modern paraphrase of *Lysistrata*, Guitry's charming *Mariette*, Sean O'Casey's delightful *Purple Dust*, the late Louis N. Parker's whimsical *Victoria* with the Queen's reign seen through the eyes of the customers of a London barbershop of the period, and the late lamented James Huneker's *Chopin*. I shall be glad to supply the company from time to time with the names of other scripts, rejected by the managers and producers, that merit a hearing. There are, too, those classics and semi-classics which the present professional theatre seemingly has no use for and declines to produce. My suggested repertory theatre might well take a fling at them: Aristophanes' *The Birds* and *The Frogs*, Shakespeare's *Measure For Measure*, Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, and Strindberg's *The Dream Play*, among others. They would provide saucy evenings.

But I know, if past records count for anything, that no one will pay the slightest attention to any of these suggestions and that, if and when the repertory theatres come

along, we will duly get the same old cut-and-dried fare. Most of the theatres will also duly sag and then duly we will get in turn the same old argument that repertory is not practical hereabout.

Among the secondary arguments will be the one that a repertory theatre can not succeed unless it has stars or popular favorites in its acting company. Many successful repertory, or stock, companies in the past have prospered handsomely by building up their own subsequent favorites and stars. Their start was with players unknown in the communities in which they operated: Vaughan Glaser, Eugenie Blair, Jessie Bonstelle, Irene Ackerman, Cecil Spooner, Priscilla Knowles, Harry Corson Clarke, Effie Germon, and others. Moreover, what makes the disputants believe that the box-office responds alone to the acting big shots? Where were they in such great hits as *Life With Father*, *Tobacco Road*, *Abie's Irish Rose*, and *Arsenic And Old Lace*? Where were they in such as *Angel Street*, *White Cargo*, *Claudia*, and *Junior Miss*? Where are they in *Dear Ruth*, *Kiss And Tell*, *I Remember Mama*, *State Of The Union*, *Born Yesterday*, and other such box-office coups? And, for postscript, where are they even in such musical show windfalls as *Oklahoma!*, *Up In Central Park*, *Carmen Jones*, *On The Town*, *Bloomer Girl*, *Billion Dollar Baby*, and *Carousel*?

Thirdly, the season again prompted the question as to just what it is that constitutes an immoral play? What prompted it was the refusal of Lee Shubert to permit the Readers Theatre group to give a performance of John Ford's seventeenth century *'Tis Pity She's A Whore* in one of his theatres for fear that its license might be revoked. There was and is no criticism of Mr. Shubert. Under the existing puzzling censorship conception of immorality he was thoroughly justified in playing safe. Any good business man would have done the same thing.

It has long since become plain that this confusion in censorship morals not only in New York but in many of the cities of the nation calls, if possible, for some standardization. The theatre has a right to know what is what.

As things presently go, there is simply no means of its telling just what may be censorable and what may not be. Take the Ford minor classic, for example. As almost every student of the drama knows, it deals with incestuous love. But it deals with it unsensationally, honestly, and cleanly. Havelock Ellis wrote of it, as quoted by the Readers Theatre in defense of its projected presentation, "Ford has touched (in this play) the highest point that he ever reached. He never after succeeded in presenting an image so simple, passionate and complex, so free comparatively from mixture of weak and base elements, as that of the boy and girl lovers who were brother and sister. The tragic story is unrolled from first to last with fine truth and clear perception. The conflict between the world's opinion and the heart's desire he paints and repaints, not as a moralist browbeating the cynical or conventional world, but as an artist, presenting problems which he does not undertake to solve save by the rough methods of the tragic stage. It is the grief deeper than language that he strives to express." Yet, since incest falls under the local censorship threat to plays dealing in any manner with "degeneracy," Mr. Shubert obviously could not know which way to turn. Both *Mourning Becomes Electra* and *The Barretts Of Wimpole Street* treated of incest, but both were allowed to run unmolested. And there have been others which similarly were not interfered with. What, then, would it have been that might possibly cause the Ford play to be singled out for suppression? Just when is incest censorable and just when is it not? The Readers Theatre's incestuous *Oedipus Rex*, its initial offering, had no voice lifted against it. But who could be certain on this occasion? The mere presence of the word "whore" in the play's title (a word that even popular magazines have not always been able to print with impunity) might conceivably have prejudiced the moralists against the play itself. It was a gambler's chance all around, and Mr. Shubert was sensible enough not to take the risk.

There exists, clearly, a freak state of affairs not only in a case like this, but in many others. In some cities *Tobacco Road* has been banned largely on the score of a scene in

which a Georgia cracker girl indulges in amatory antics in order to inflame a man's libido. In one or two of the very same cities Mae West's similar antics in *Catherine Was Great* which led up to one of the dirtiest bedroom scenes ever seen on the American stage has not aroused a single moralist peep. In New York, both *The Lure* and *Maya* were frowned upon by the professors of virtue because houses of ill-fame figured in them. Yet houses of ill-fame figured also in half a dozen other plays, among them *Mahogany Hall* and *Behind Red Lights*, with no protest registered against them. Moreover, if any dirt was involved, there was considerably more of it in the latter than in the former.

The musical show, *Wine, Women and Song*, was raided, shut down and its theatre's license rescinded for a year on the ground that its comedians cracked a few sex jokes and that a semi-nude gymnastic dancer had a pair of phosphorescent hands painted on her aft embonpoint. A semi-nude gymnastic dancer with a pair of phosphorescent hands painted on the same section of the anatomy was a feature of Charles H. Yale's spectacular *Twelve Temptations* all of fifty years ago and played throughout the country without the slightest objection. And yet we hear talk that morals change and that what once was considered immoral is no longer, with the increased liberality, considered so. As for the jokes in *Wine, Women and Song*, they were pure Sunday school in comparison with those in the musical shows *Hairpin Harmony* and *The Duchess Misbehaves*, among others, which the moralists did not deign to notice. Censorship and the police brought about the closing in New York of both *The Captive* and *Trio* because they treated of woman's aberrant love of woman. Why, then, among others, were *Girls In Uniform*, *Love of Women*, and *Wise Tomorrow*, which dealt with the same theme, not closed?

The whole thing amounts to confusion doubly confused. *Idiot's Delight* was banned in one Western city because of dialogue indicating that a man and woman, unmarried, had occupied the same room together. In that same city identical dialogue and intimation in at least a dozen plays

attracted no moralist attention whatever. When immorality, so called, is not immoral is obviously impossible for the theatre to determine.

One of the biggest successes of the season in New York was the Lunts' vehicle, *O Mistress Mine*. It was accepted as delightful, charming, and what not by almost everyone who saw it, including the majority of the reviewers and, apparently, the moralists themselves. It dealt with a middle-aged mother of a boy of eighteen who enters into fornicatory relations with a man for the luxuries it will bring her. One of the big musical successes was *Billion Dollar Baby*. It dealt with a young girl egged on by her grafting mother to get all she could from men by whatever means. *The Voice Of The Turtle*, one of the most popular plays in many years, apotheosizes illicit love, as the also immensely popular *Harvey* endorses drunkenness. Yet there has been no slightest hint of moral censorship in the case of any of them. One of these days, however, some play with a theme much like *O Mistress Mine* or *The Voice Of The Turtle* is likely to be pounced upon by censorship and its theatre license suspended. It will not matter whether that censorship is individual, municipal, police, or jury; the suppression will amount to the same thing. Is there no way for the theatre to tell in advance exactly what is actionable and what is not?

The motion pictures know pretty well how far they may go. Aside from the Johnston office's regulations, which we pray may never have an equivalent in the theatre, the various state and city boards of censorship have made their prejudices clear. Now and then some idiotic board like that in Memphis may eccentrically rule that in a picture a white man can not tip his hat to a Negro, even in comedy, and censor a film like *The Sailor Takes A Wife*. But in the main the cinema, even at the expense of intelligence and artistic ruin, at least appreciates where the moralists generally stand. We do not want any such nonsensical censorship in the theatre; we do not need it as the cinema with its juvenile audiences possibly needs it. But with the theatre's undisputed very much higher cultural status and



with its adult audiences it deserves from censorship, whether actual or potential, some definite opinion on what exactly is and is not taboo. For example, if a producer wished to put on Schnitzler's *Reigen* today, would he be safe from interference? The play got into trouble with the viceroys years ago, but would it get into trouble now? Is there no way for a producer to find out without risking 50,000 dollars or more on a production? It is possible in England, why not here? What, also, about such still locally unseen plays by equally reputable authors as Stephen Phillips' version of *The Cenci*, Maurice Donnay's before-mentioned version of *Lysistrata*, Wedekind's trilogy, *Fit For Anything*, *In Full Cry* and (too literally) *Washed In All Waters*, et al.

Returning to the New York censorship threat against plays dealing with sexual degeneracy, it is difficult to deduce, if such threat is honest, why plays like *Oscar Wilde*, *Night Must Fall*, *Hand In Glove*, *Murder Without Crime* and the sort have been permitted to run without interference. They are of sexual degeneracy all compact. What is the censorship means of differentiation between the degeneracy of *Trio* and *Oscar Wilde*, for example? Does it condone the sexual aberrations of men while it condemns those of women?

We certainly, to repeat, do not want censorship of any kind. We also certainly do not want flu or pneumonia. But we get it nonetheless. Cures have been perfected in the case of the latter, though they do not guarantee a repetition of the disease. Let us, helpless as apparently we seem to be in the situation, try to do something to assist the theatre at least equally in the instance of censorship. Let the censors in all parts of the country tell us concretely what they object to. In other words, let them stipulate exactly what they consider to be obscene, lascivious, lewd and indecent in the matter of themes, dialogue, stage business, etc. The vaudeville theatres in their heyday defined such things for themselves and the producers of acts and the performers knew just what they could and could not do. There is always final recourse to the courts if the censors go too far.

In the meantime, theatre producers would be spared, through antecedent knowledge, the present unnecessary loss of money. Let the censors further be persuaded to consistency. If they condemn one play for one thing, why do they not condemn another for exactly the same thing? Let us clear the air. In short, if we must have interference, as we periodically must, let the theatre be informed specifically and not in general, meaningless, and often contradictory terms.

Finally, do not for a moment imagine that I am supporting censorship of any kind. What I am doing is reluctantly acknowledging that, like the poor and colds in the nose, it is always with us, however much we may protest, and that the best thing we can do under the circumstances, while girding for an eventual showdown fight, is to horn some mild rationality into it. When censorship in New York and various other cities freely allows some such filthy dose of garbage as *School For Brides* a free rein and yet clamps the lid on or forbids the presentation of some such honest play as *The Captive*, even the monkeys at the zoo are to be forgiven for hitting themselves frantically on the head. It doesn't make sense.



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# The Theatre Book of the Year

1945  1946



## Honor List

THE BEST NEW DRAMATIC PLAY:

*A SOUND OF HUNTING*, by Harry Brown

THE BEST NEW COMEDY:

*THE MERMAIDS SINGING*,

by John van Druten

THE BEST NEW MUSICAL:

*CALL ME MISTER*, by Arnold Auerbach and  
Harold J. Rome

THE BEST MALE ACTING PERFORMANCE:

MAURICE EVANS, in *Hamlet*

THE BEST FEMALE ACTING PERFORMANCE:

JUDY HOLLIDAY, in *Born Yesterday*

THE BEST ENSEMBLE PERFORMANCE:

The *A SOUND OF HUNTING* company

THE BEST STAGE DIRECTOR, DRAMATIC:

GEORGE SCHAEFER, in *Hamlet*

THE BEST STAGE DIRECTOR, MUSICAL:

ROUBEN MAMOULIAN, in *St. Louis Woman*

THE BEST SCENE DESIGNER, DRAMATIC:

ROBERT EDMOND JONES, in *Lute Song*

THE BEST SCENE DESIGNER, MUSICAL:

LEMUEL AYRES, in *St. Louis Woman*

THE BEST COSTUME DESIGNER, DRAMATIC:

ROBERT EDMOND JONES, in *Lute Song*

THE BEST COSTUME DESIGNER, MUSICAL:

LEMUEL AYRES, in *St. Louis Woman*

THE BEST STAGE LIGHTING:

JO MIELZINER, in *Jeb*

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# The Year's Productions

BLUE HOLIDAY. MAY 21, 1945

*A variety show, with music and lyrics by Al Moritz and additional songs by E. Y. Harburg, Earl Robinson, et al. Produced by Irvin Shapiro and Doris Cole for 10 performances in the Belasco Theatre.*

## PRINCIPALS

Ethel Waters, Josh White, Willie Bryant, Katherine Dunham dancers, Mary Lou Williams, Timmie Rogers, Josephine Premice, the Hall Johnson choir, the Chocolateers, and the Three Poms.

Director: *Monroe B. Hack.*

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THE DEFECT of the so-called variety shows is their fundamental lack of variety. The variety which they individually offer sometimes fulfils the strict meaning of the word, but as a class they are much of an internal piece and largely repetitions of one another. Even in the case of the individual shows the variety is for the most part confined to the dictionary definition rather than to the theatrical, since the acts which constitute them follow the basic patterns of acts recognizable from long previous service. The good variety show, as things go, is thus simply one whose familiar acts are even a slight improvement over the equally familiar acts in a bad variety show.

Appreciating all this, a Negro variety show generally tries to lend itself an air of superficial difference and novelty by pacing the venerable acts so swiftly that the audience will be persuaded to excuse the old "Variety is the spice of life" in favor of "Life is the spice of variety." The average darkey vaudeville is accordingly most often charged with such an excess of physical vitality and motion that — talent not figuring the one way or the other — the im-

pression is of a stage peopled by infuscate simulacra of George M. Cohan, Jimmy Durante, Paavo Nurmi, Sonja Henie, Joan McCracken, and Herbert Bayard Swope being chased this way and that by a riot squad headed by a George Abbott infected with hydrophobia.

This *Blue Holiday*, which launched the intermediate warm weather season, though Negro vaudeville was, however, strangely and surprisingly so languidly Caucasian that it provided its audience with little such superficial distraction and gave it plenty of time to become bored with the same old routines. There were, true enough, the occasional dancers, male and female, who mistook an anatomical and pedal frenzy for terpsichorean virtuosity and who offered the customary copious perspiration and climactic porpoise breathing in the hope of impressing the spectators that what they had just negotiated was superhumanly complex and difficult. But in this case their violent activities only emphasized doubly the passivity of the other acts.

That passivity which permeated these other acts was grounded upon two things: first, the circumstance that in one form or another they had long since passed their given point and, secondly, that some of them were of that arty tendency which operated toward putting what was called "advanced vaudeville" in its grave many years ago. In those days, just as vaudeville was going along wonderfully, some rare genius was seized with the idea that what it needed to make it gallop along even more so was to interrupt its acrobats, trained seals, and comedians who fell off the stage onto the bass drum with dramatic actresses in scenes from their legitimate successes, celebrated opera coloratura singers, and other such *hors d'œuvres* from tonier quarters. And it was not long thereafter that the acrobats were stealing the fish out of the seals' mouths, that the comedians were likewise on their uppers, and that advanced vaudeville rolled over and breathed its last.

Ethel Waters in scenes from her dramatic success, *Mam-ba's Daughters*, Katherine Dunham dancers in Haitian and other pantomimic ballets, Hall Johnson choirs, and similar items may be commendable in their places, but their

places are not in a vaudeville show. And, even if they were, they would call for a lot better auxiliary numbers than those which surrounded them in the present exhibit. One can hardly expect an audience any longer to toast the memories of the Messrs. Pastor, Keith, Proctor and Albee in the presence of comedians who elaborately wet their thumbs and forefingers and crease their trousers, of knock-about hoofers who hit one another over the heads with their hats, of colored funny men who bare wide their teeth in grins at the conclusion of every joke, and of tap dancers who triumphantly end their furious purposelessness by throwing themselves to the floor and negotiating splits.

Even were these acceptable, an audience might further be anticipated to call quits on the evident later day Negro conviction that it is essential for their shows to have a vocal injection of social-mindedness and Americanism. I, for one, am perfectly willing to admit that our colored brothers may be every bit as social-minded and patriotic as anybody else without having to be insistently reminded of the fact at a vaudeville show between boogie-woogie numbers, Lindy hop dancers, and acts in which a comedian portentously comes on with a big harp and then plays a small guitar.

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## FOXHOLE IN THE PARLOR. MAY 23, 1945

*A play by Elsa Shelley. Produced by Harry Bloomfield for 44 performances in, initially, the Booth Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

LEROY	<i>Reginald Beane</i>	DENNIS PATTERSON
TOM AUSTEN	<i>Russell Hardie</i>	<i>Montgomery Clift</i>
VICKI KING	<i>Ann Lincoln</i>	KATE MITCHELL
ANN AUSTEN	<i>Flora Campbell</i>	<i>Grace Coppin</i>
SENATOR BOWEN	<i>Raymond Greenleaf</i>	

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *Late afternoon, Friday.* Scene 2. *The next day.* Act II. Scene 1. *Evening, Saturday.* Scene 2. *The next day. Sunday. At twilight.*

*The action of the play takes place on a rare little street in Lower Manhattan. The time is mid-April, 1945.*

Director: *John Haggott.*

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THE AUTHOR prefaced her evening with a brochure distributed to the audience wherein she heralded her purpose as follows:

"I asked a psychiatrist at an Army hospital, 'What is the most general specific cause for the emotional and mental breakdown of men in combat?' And the psychiatrist answered, 'The insult to the spirit.' The body accommodates itself to the beastly existence of a fox in a hole in the ground; the spirit rebels. The spirit of all mankind is aflame now with resentment at the insult which this war has hurled against it. People are demanding that there shall be no more wars, ever. But the flame dies, and people forget. And therein lies the danger. The flame of rebellion against war *must* be kept alive in the heart of each and every one of us! Our appointed peace-makers at the peace conference *must* build the foundation for permanent peace, and we at home must keep ever reminding them of this!"

Since the human spirit, to say nothing of the human corpus, probably rebels no more at the beastly existence of a fox in a hole in the ground than at the beastly existence of a dog in a squalid tenement or even of an actor in a long succession of miserable one-night stands, and since it was a gross exaggeration to argue that the spirit of *all* mankind was aflame with resentment at the so-called insult, considering the established fact that there are nations and peoples and men who ideologically and professionally scarcely believe it to be an insult but rather esteem it, it became clear that what the author's stage would presently disclose would be a substantial mixture of feminine sentimentality and shallow thinking, which duly proved to be the case.

Electing as her protagonist a returned soldier suffering from psychic wounds induced by the spectacle of promiscuous slaughter, Miss Shelley, speaking through him, presented his determination to rid the cosmos of future wars and to establish a firm and lasting peace. As his author's mouthpiece, what had the soldier to offer in the way of philosophy in these directions? To prevent wars, his idea seemed to be that people should be impressed with the news that wars between whatever nations are in reality civil wars and fights between brothers; let people only realize this and wars would promptly cease. (The class is dismissed for ten minutes until it can contain its laughter.) And to insure a lasting peace, his notion was that peace conferences such as that held in San Francisco should hearken to the Bible and to elements in the Hebrew Passover service and should "open the door and let God sit at the table." (The class is again excused, for fifteen minutes.)

These great profundities Miss Shelley merchanted in terms of a psychoneurotic serviceman, which only made things waywardly funnier, and gravely brought down her final curtain on the young man's loud banging on a piano to indicate his spiritual release, which made them funnier still. And the further circumstance that the serviceman's elder sister was presented as the play's arch-villainess be-

cause she hinted that he was slightly cracked, to the lofty derision of all the other characters, may be allowed hardly to have helped matters.

The author's subsidiary philosophies were no less piquant, involving among other things an apparent conviction that sherry is a very powerful aphrodisiac. And her literary esprit may perhaps best be appreciated from such lines, addressed to a young woman, as "You're like a drink of spring water to a man with a fever."

Montgomery Clift, ordinarily a talented young actor, interpreted the psychoneurosis of the soldier by wandering around the stage in a thick pea-soup fog with a bilious look on his face, which suggested a man afflicted with psychoneurosis somewhat less than one afflicted from too much indulgence in the bottle. The rest of the company was chiefly notable for mispronouncing more words — "pianist," "divan," etc. — than any company I have engaged since the heyday of the Cecil Spooner stock company. And adding to the occasion's difficulties was Lee Simonson's moving platform setting of two houses which, aside from causing the stage action to be hidden alternately from those sitting to the far right and left of the auditorium, seemed to call for the services of a train conductor.

The previous season divulged no less than eleven plays, all negligible, dealing in one manner or another with returned servicemen. This marked the twelfth miss within a twelve month span.

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## MEMPHIS BOUND. MAY 24, 1945

*A musical comedy based on Gilbert and Sullivan's H.M.S. Pinafore, with lyrics and score by Don Walker and Clay Warnick, book by Albert Barker and Sally Benson. Produced by John Wildberg, with an assist by Vinton Freedley, for 36 performances in, initially, the Broadway Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

HECTOR	William C. Smith	PILOT MERIWETHER	Bill Robinson
MELISSA CARTER (AUNT MEL)	Edith Wilson	TIMMY	Timothy Grace
CHLOE	Anna Robinson	SHERIFF McDANIELS	Oscar Plante
ROY BAGGOTT	Billy Daniels	EULALIA	Joy Merrimore
MRS. PARADISE	Ada Brown	SARABELLE	Harriet Jackson
LILY VALENTINE	Sheila Guys	BILL	Charles Welch
PENNY PARADISE	Ida James	GABRIEL	William Dillard
HENNY PARADISE	Thelma Carpenter	CHERUBS,	Georgia Ann Timmons, Marlene Strong, Delta Rhythm Boys, Travers Crawford, Rene de Knight, Carl Jones, Kelsey Pharr, Lee Gaines.
MR. FINCH	Frank Wilson		
WINFIELD CARTER	Avon Long		

**SYNOPSIS:** Place. *Near Calliboga, Tenn.* Time. *The present.* Act I. Scene 1. *Deck of the Calliboga Queen.* Scene 2. *A street.* Scene 3. *A cell in Calliboga jail.* Scene 4. *H. M. S. Pinafore aboard the Calliboga Queen.* Act II. Scene 1. *The village square.* Scene 2. *The street.* Scene 3. *The cell. That night.* Scene 4. *The trial.* Scene 5. *The cell. Next morning.* Scene 6. *The street.* Scene 7. *Pops Meriwether in the rest of Pinafore.*

Director: Robert Ross.

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**I**N ORDER to obtain the money wherewith to get a Mississippi river showboat off the mud-bank upon which it has drifted, the Negro proprietress arranges for a production by her Negro friends of *Pinafore*, only to find to her subsequent dismay that they have jazzed, jived and swung it and that one of them, to boot, has made off with the box-office receipts. So much constitutes the first act, which offers some life and amusement. The second act, however, finds not only the proprietress but the authors without any fur-



ther ideas and the show, after a plausible start, slowly proceeds to go to pieces and collapses entirely when, not knowing what else to do, it brings on a paraphrase of *Trial By Jury* with the apology that it is invariably on the same bill as *Pinafore*, which it isn't. Making matters worse, the paraphrase unloads Mr. Barker's and Miss Benson's idea of satire upon that of Mr. Gilbert, which, as might be expected, does Mr. Gilbert's no good. And making matters worse still, Mr. Barker and Miss Benson see fit to alter Mr. Gilbert's hilarious ending and thereby disembowel the whole thing.

Nor is their general conception of humor any richer. "Remember," proclaims one of the showboat actors, "I am a ranking star!" "You are rank all right, but you ain't no star," retorts his vis-à-vis. "You says I'm a kleptomaniac," observes a character. "Well, don't you worry; I take things for that." A Negro comes on wearing a furry hat. "Who are you?" he is asked. "I'm the sheriff's possum," he replies.

Some of the arrangements of the Sullivan music are fair enough, though nowhere is there a trace of the high ingenuity of a Russell Bennett in the case of *Carmen Jones*. Nor are the new lyrics anywhere near the great competence of an Oscar Hammerstein in that same show. On a lower level, the exhibit misses even the skill of the two jazz paraphrases of another of the Gilbert and Sullivan operettas: *The Hot Mikado* and *The Swing Mikado*.

What virtues the show by and large possessed lay principally in such external directions as Bill Robinson's remarkable tap dancing—the old fellow at sixty-seven was still as spry as carbonated water; the prettiest colored girl in one Sheila Guys that the stage has disclosed since Winnie Johnson last displayed herself on it; a wild dancing ensemble that, if it didn't lift the roof certainly knocked down the floor; some amusing costuming by Lucinda Ballard; and an orchestra under the direction of Charles Sanford that periodically and obligingly drowned out such stage-imposed pseudo-Negro locutions as "Son, do I detect a contumacious twitch upon that callow physiognomy of youth?"

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## ROUND TRIP. MAY 29, 1945

*A comedy by Mary Orr and Reginald Denham. Produced by Clifford Hayman for 7 performances in the Biltmore Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

EDGAR ALBRIGHT	<i>Sidney Blackmer</i>	GRISELDA	<i>Angela Jaye</i>
VIRGINIA ALBRIGHT		TOMMY ROLLS	<i>Robert Woodburn</i>
	<i>Patricia Kirkland</i>	LINDA MARBLE	<i>Phyllis Brooks</i>
DONALD McDERMOTT	<i>Paul Marlin</i>	HORTENSE	<i>Viola Dean</i>
SARAH ALBRIGHT	<i>June Walker</i>	JACK ADMIRALL	<i>Edward Rowley</i>
JANE DANIELS	<i>Edith Meiser</i>	LLOYD WILDE	<i>Morton L. Stevens</i>
CLIVE DELAFIELD	<i>Eddie Nugent</i>		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *The den of the Albrights' home, Ironville, Ohio. A late afternoon in May, 1945.* Scene 2. *The same, 1:30 a.m. Two weeks later.* Act II. Scene 1. *Clive Delafield's apartment in the Woodrow Hotel, New York City. The following noon.* Scene 2. *The same. A few hours later.* Act III. *Same as Act I. A month later.*

Director: *Reginald Denham.*

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WHEN THE BILL is a play about married life and one called for good measure *Round Trip* and when you read any such general scene synopsis in the program as *Act I. The Albrights' home, afternoon in May; Act II. Clive Delafield's apartment in New York, two weeks later; Act III. Same as Act I, a month later*, the theatre must be a considerable stranger to you if you can not foretell exactly what will happen after the curtain has gone up. You will know that Mrs. Albright, given to romantic ideas and finding no outlet in her prosaic husband, will presently pack up and hie herself to the dashing Clive's flat, will soon become disillusioned in respect to the insincere dog, and will duly return, a chastened woman, to her home and spouse, whom she will at length come to appreciate as a man of solid parts withal. The theme's present and latest taxidermists have in no wise cheated one's anticipation. It is all there once again, including such usual collateral ele-

ments as the sophisticated young daughter who lectures her parents in sex matters, Clive's hard-boiled blonde mistress who mistakes his relationship with Mrs. Albright and stamps furiously out of his chambers, the pert colored maid who is constantly shooed out of the room to her audible suspicion, and the family lawyer who is called in to arrange the Albrights' divorce only to have his new hat stepped on and squashed in the final wild reconciliation.

It is remotely possible, of course, that even such ossuary materials might be converted into fairly acceptable theatrical fare by witty and skilful hands, but the present hands have at them like amateur plumbers, and grimy ones. When they are not dirty, which is nine-tenths of the time, their reprise resolves itself into the "But people might misunderstand" species of dramatic writing, and when it tires of such atrophic dialogue it has brilliant recourse to such sister stuff as "Why am I talking so much?" Their conception of humor is equally fecund. "Don't pull the Lambs' Club wool over my eyes!" exclaims a female character to an actor character. In reference to the latter, another character observes that it is too bad the wife didn't stay home and partake of her favorite veal loaf instead of going out with half-baked ham. "Bathing and adultery are a lot the same," announces the blonde mistress; "they both get you into hot water." "My name is Mrs. Albright, not All Night," indignantly corrects that lady. "Whatever about my mind, I am as biologically pure as Ivory Soap," proclaims the ingénue. Alluding to a filmy black nightgown, the blonde sneeringly declares, "As for me, I don't go into mourning when I jump into bed." "I'm sorry I couldn't do anything about the fatted calf," says the daughter to her repentantly returned mother. "I understand — the meat shortage," drolly returns the latter. And the phrase, "A roll in the alfalfa," pops up at regular intervals. Things, indeed, are still more aggravated. The authors are not satisfied to use the piece of chalk on the back fence; their play is one massive chalk cliff dictating to itself and tumbling its scribblers off into the accumulated drip of mud below.

The acting and direction were in key with the quality of the script. June Walker, as the romantically inclined wife, gurgled her longings as if she were an expiring *cabinet d'aisances*. Eddie Nugent, as the actor-lover given to quoting amorous lines from the plays he had appeared in (another original touch), interpreted his frantic bewilderment by wearing his shirt collar open and his tie dangling, nervously putting on his jacket over his overcoat, and in the interim throwing himself into a chair and gazing Rodin-wise at his trousers' fly. As the beset husband, Sidney Blackmer, given nothing else to do by the authors, indicated his resignation by making frequent slow exits and reappearing presently in a succession of nobby new suits. And so generally with the rest.

The sewage was promptly reconsigned to its place underground.

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HOLLYWOOD PINAFORE. MAY 31, 1945

*A version of the Gilbert and Sullivan operetta by George S. Kaufman. Produced by Max Gordon, in association with Meyer Davis, for 52 performances in the Alvin Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

JOSEPH W. PORTER	Victor Moore	MISS GLORIA MUNDI	Diana Corday
MIKE CORCORAN	George Rasely	MISS BEVERLY WILSHIRE	
RALPH RACKSTRAW	Gilbert Russell		Pamela Randell
DICK LIVE-EYE	William Gaxton	LITTLE MISS PEGGY	Ella Mayer
BRENDA BLOSSOM		DOORMAN	Dan de Paolo
	Annamary Dickey	SECRETARIES	Jackson Jordan
LOUHEDDA HOPSONS	Shirley Booth		Eleanor Prentiss
BOB BECKETT	Russ Brown		Drucilla Strain
MISS HEBE	Mary Wickes	GUARD	Ernest Taylor
Viola Essen and the Lyn Murray Singers			

SYNOPSIS: *The scene is the Pinafore Pictures Studio, Hollywood.*

Act I. Morning. Act II. Night.

Director: George S. Kaufman.

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W. S. GILBERT wrote one version of *Pinafore* for an adult audience and subsequently another for children. G. S. Kaufman has now written a third for an in-between group, to wit, the Broadway audience. To interest children, whom he did not otherwise in the least condescend to but treated with respect for their intelligence, Gilbert simply paraphrased several of his lyrics with allusions to things which were intimately and pleasurably recognizable to them, as in his children's version of *The Mikado* he added to Ko-Ko's index expurgatorius, for example, "All people who maintain, in solemn earnest—not in joke, That quantities of sugar-plums are bad for little folk." Mr. Kaufman apparently has not the faith in Broadway audiences that Gilbert had in youngsters and has not rested with any such minor alterations. Thinking to play safe with them, he has taken Gilbert's admirably satirical book and lyrics on the Royal Navy and turned them into

a burlesque show about Hollywood. Mr. Kaufman is a witty and clever man, but one fears that all he has done on this particular occasion is to draw a mustache on Gilbert, who already had one, and a walrus beauty.

I am not one of the critical Torys who falls over in a dead faint when anyone lays hold of a classic or semi-classic and seeks to have a little impertinent fun with it. But it is my choice, when anyone does, that he prove himself of enough inventiveness and humor to make the result happily digestible. While restraining myself from prostration, I accordingly can not persuade myself to react uproariously to anyone like Mr. Kaufman whose ingenuity does not seem to be more expansive than paraphrasing Gilbert's subtitle to "The Lad Who Loved A Salary," converting Dick Deadeye into a movie agent named Dick Live-Eye, changing Little Buttercup into a composite of Louella Parsons and Hedda Hopper under the name of Louhedda Hopsons and making her sing punningly about her inclination to butter-up, and introducing a pair of girls christened Gloria Mundi and Beverly Wilshire.

Since Mr. Kaufman collaborated on the excellent Hollywood lampoon, *Once In A Lifetime*, back in 1930, too many such things, most of them pretty dreary, have come and gone, and what juice the target might once have had has sometime since been squeezed out of it. *Hollywood Pinafore* is thus not only fifteen years too late but, in quality, considerably more than fifteen points below Kaufman par. Its few amusing moments are hardly sufficient recompense for its fundamental and over-all obviousness.

That obviousness, in addition to the samples already noted, extends to converting the Gilbert characters into the routine dumb Hollywood executive, the stereotyped agent intent on his ten percent commission, the studio writer who is treated with contempt, the haughty movie star, the cynical press-agent, and the long overworked and familiar like. As substitutes for the Gilbertian wit and humor, Mr. Kaufman seems further to be able to do no better than such dialogue as "We're doing the under-water scenes tomorrow," with the reply, "I'll drop in"; "We'll make a

picture of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Raven*," with the executive's puzzled "Poe, who's he? Oh yes, an Italian!"; and "What's a naturalist?" with the rejoinder, "One who behaves naturally." And when he is not given to such puns, in connection with a suggested picture based on the dumb executive's life, as titling it "From Rags To Rushes," his satiric gifts occupy themselves in observing of the then Hays office censorship that "If two people are in bed, they must be either wed — or dead." Under the circumstances, it is regrettable that Gilbert was not, like Sullivan's music, left undisturbed, since what emerges is little more than an expensively staged minor and dated college show burlesque.

In the last half dozen or more seasons, there has been no shortage of stage wares dealing facetiously with Hollywood and its idiosyncrasies. *Beverly Hills*, *Quiet, Please!*, *Glamour Preferred*, *Get Away*, *Old Man*, and *Public Relations* were the names of some of them, and none has impressed its customers as other than a belated rehash of already long cold meat. Adding music, and particularly Sullivan's, to the rehash may be a relatively fresh and acceptable touch, but theatre audiences seem nevertheless increasingly to suggest that they have advanced in the matter of any interest in and even in the matter of any laughter at the doings of the picture fowl.

The authors of the directly antecedent *Memphis Bound*, whatever they did not succeed in accomplishing thus at least for half the evening indicated a wiser approach to the *Pinafore* caper. By keeping its materials intact save for a jazzing of the music and simply transferring them to a Negro setting, oblique humor was visited upon original humor without any violation, at any rate in sound critical intent, whereas in *Hollywood Pinafore* Mr. Kaufman has vitiated the original humor by superimposing upon it a direct and extrinsic humorlessness of his independent own. There are better ways to paraphrase *Pinafore*, if the wish be in that direction. Arthur Kober's idea, which one producer toyed with a year or so ago, of laying the scene in a Catskill summer camp and making Gilbert's characters

Jewish was one such. A college show back in my own ancient times provided another in changing the setting from the deck of H.M.S. *Pinafore* to crew headquarters. Another still might be a modernization of the book with the old battleship converted into some such fancy ocean liner as the *Queen Mary*. But in any case it would take the equivalent of the Gilbert who travestied Tennyson satisfactorily to travesty Gilbert. All that Kaufman has managed is to travesty, and very poorly, the Kaufman who once helped to travesty Hollywood so successfully.

The players, even such one-time drolls as the Messrs. Moore and Gaxton, were depressed by the script's humidity, and only in Jo Mielziner's setting and in the costumes of the Misses Kuhn and Schenck was there the wit that should have extended to that script and the lyrics.



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CONCERT VARIETIES. JUNE 1, 1945

*A composite concert hall-vaudeville show. Produced by Billy Rose for 36 performances in the Ziegfeld Theatre.*

## PRINCIPALS

Deems Taylor, Katherine Dunham, Jerome Robbins, Zero Mostel, Rosario and Antonio, the Salici puppets, Ammons, Johnson and Catlett, Eddie Mayehoff, Nestor Chayres, Imogene Coca, and William Archibald.

Director: *Billy Rose.*

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**B**EFORE HIS EXHIBIT OPENED, Billy Rose inserted large advertisements in the newspapers in which he announced that concert halls were chiefly notable for their sleeping accommodations and that, since it was his opinion that audiences — he did not mention critics — doubtless prefer to do their sleeping *chez soi*, he was going to change things by relieving the concert numbers in his show with “the bread-and-butter rules of Broadway adding sock to the sacrosanct,” or in other words with popular vaudeville acts.

Mr. Rose, a man of his word, did exactly what he promised, which was not altogether fortunate. His concert numbers were fully commendable and his audience belied his philosophy by remaining wide-awake at them, whereas his vaudeville relief took over the drowsiness allegedly induced by the concert halls. To this embarrassing contretemps, there was but one exception: the Salici puppets, a vaudeville act which opened the bill and which for a short while made one think that perhaps Billy may after all have had something on the ball.

The great Toscanini has been quoted as saying that Vittorio Podrecca's Theatre of the Piccoli is “the finest entertainment on the contemporary stage,” which, with all due respect to the most estimable of conductors, is childish nonsense, worthy of the cerebration of a trombone player. It surely requires the peculiar mentality that swoons in ecstasy over animated cartoons, female performers of mono-

drama, and virtuoso imitators of the sounds made by animals and steamboat whistles to venerate the entertainment implicit in marionettes, however exceptional, above that in the flesh and blood drama on its upper levels, the dancing of lovely girls, and the surge and song of the living stage. Nevertheless, all such exaggeration aside, sufficient endorsement of the marionette stage, whether Podrecca or Salici, which is almost equally resourceful, remains in more intelligent restraint. It provides good entertainment; it exercises a fascination quite apart from its uncommon expertness; its artificial life has a vital attraction all its own; and it enjoys in the aggregate a perfection of accomplishment that one all too often misses in the efforts of human stage dummies.

There are those who gag at the notion of spending time looking at manikins and who insist that they would rather look at actors in the flesh, however bad, than at puppets such as those of the Salicis', however good. It is amusing to reflect that such people are the very same who nevertheless freely and delightedly accept and swallow realistically the actor shadows on a motion picture screen.

The favorable impression made by the Salici dolls was, however, of brief duration, since immediately thereafter vaudeville in the person of one Eddie Mayehoff, a reputed comic, issued forth and in less time than it took the audience to say Morpheus made it yearn for any kind of concert hall whatever. Mr. Mayehoff's act, the principal property of which was a cigar, consisted in an imitation of a business executive exhorting his employes and in chewing violently on the aforesaid property when he was not grimacingly scratching his abdomen. The act was a relaxant paraphrase of Zero Mostel's relaxant act minus the cigar in which the latter gives an imitation of a Senator exhorting his constituents. Zero and his act showed up for extra measure later.

Next on the bill, which was presided over by the cultured, if uncomfortable, Deems Taylor as master of ceremonies, was the concert or at least approximately concert "Caprice Espagnol," danced beautifully to the music of

Rimsky-Korsakoff by Rosario and Antonio. And following it was a concert item by the Mexican tenor, Nestor Chayres, which was very pleasing. Rosario and Antonio then obliged again with "Dansa Ritual del Fuego" to the music of Manuel de Falla, no dog of a composer. During these numbers, not a snore was heard in the house, and a good time was had by all. But vaudeville then once more reared its head in the appearance of Miss Imogene Coca, a young woman whose fond delusion it seems to be that a foolish grin constitutes her a comédienne comparable to Fannie Brice. Miss Coca began her act with what purported to be a comedy strip-tease. Wearing a man's heavy overcoat, she slowly removed the hairpins from her coiffure, let it fall over her shoulders, demurely displayed a bit of her leg from under the overcoat, and then took off the overcoat and revealed herself in a similar overcoat underneath. She thereupon coyly made an exit only to reappear a moment later in a series of what she announced would be imitations of famous movie stars.

Her first imitation was, she said, of Pola Negri and consisted solely in a blue sequined head-dress and a large feather fan. Her second, which she announced was of Clara Bow, again consisted primarily in a beanie hat and a few jitterbug steps. This further, she confided, represented the Scott Fitzgerald period. Her third was, she proclaimed, of a modern screen glamour girl like Lana Turner and consisted yet again simply in donning a tight-fitting sweater with a couple of oversized tin cans adjusted to her mammary glands. Miss Coca concluded her act by draping herself in several dilapidated fur pieces and singing a song, with smirks, about how nice it would be for a man to give one to his wife or, more smirks, girl-friend.

The audience presently awakened to a ballet called "Interplay," by Jerome Robbins with music by Morton Gould, a concert stage number that was at once original, imaginative, charmingly simple and unpretentious, and very ably danced by Robbins and his company.

The good concert news continued, after an intermission, with Katherine Dunham and her proficient dancers in

three excellent numbers: Brazilian, Mexican, and Martinique with music respectively by the Messrs. Vicenty, MacDonald and Anderson, and with the stage drums handsomely attended to by the Messrs. Vicenty, Estrada and Mendez. But again veronal dripped on the house with the vaudeville reappearance of Miss Coca and a dance partner in what must have been the thousandth burlesque of Debussy's "Afternoon Of A Faun," and it was only when it was mercifully over that Messrs. Ammons, Johnson and Catlett in a concert demonstration of the boogie-woogie piano and drum art repopped the drooping eyes.

But then still again vaudeville contaminated pleasure in the person of the before noted Mostel, whose act opened with an imitation of an Italian opera singer which consisted wholly in wearing a pair of earrings and screaming pig-English at the top of his lungs. Deems Taylor, momentarily leaving his role as master of ceremonies, presently came on as the representative of a musical journal and bade Mosteli, as he wittily called him, to take a page advertisement in it. Mostel stoutly refused. "My editor requested me to ask you why you have a tendency regularly to flat your high notes," observed Mr. Taylor, meaningfully. "I'll take three pages!" yelled Mostel. Mr. Taylor made his exit, and Mr. Mostel went into his stale imitation of the haranguing Senator and followed it with an imitation of a coffee percolator consisting in sitting immobile for a few minutes and then violently puffing out his cheeks and agitating his torso. The snores were interrupted when at length Rosario and Antonio reappeared for the finale in "Jota de la Dolores," with music by Tomas Breton, and in "Canasteros de Triana," music by Curritos-Matos-Villacanos.

Just as good vaudeville in the past and in even more recent times was ruined by an injection of so-called art, so here was good art ruined for a considerable part of the evening by an injection of bad vaudeville. Mr. Rose, whose heart is in the right place and whose notions for a somewhat better theatre are critically gratifying and sometimes highly propitious, this time tried simultaneously to strad-

dle two horses, and with the proverbial result. The concert portions of his *Concert Varieties* were much what they should have been, but the variety or vaudeville portions would have profited from their deletion or, if he were determined to include them come what might, from a substitution for them, in the interests of insomnia, of some good, juicy, old-fashioned custard pie acts. If you are going to mix culture and corn, it is better to serve the corn cob and all and not go in for half measures. The Rose mixture of Deems and dems only too naturally was followed by doze.

## HENRI CHRISTOPHE. JUNE 6, 1945

*A play by Dan Hammerman. Produced by the American Negro Theatre for 25 performances in the 135th Street Library Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

LADÉAUX	Charles Trent	TOUSSAINT L'OUVREURE	
ROCHELLE	Paul Steiner		Austin Briggs-Hall
DR. STEWART	Ray Marlowe	JEAN DESSALINES	William Greaves
MONCRAY	Robert Coren	VASTÉY	Fred Carter
CLODOMIRE	Yolanda Paterno	RICHARD	Roy Allen
LEBRUN	William Korff	DUPUY	Olivier Grandi
HENRI CHRISTOPHE		LE CLERC	Ray Marlowe
	Frederick O'Neal	BRUNET	Charles Glassoff
MARIE LOUISE	Edith Whiteman	FATHER GONZALES	Edward Alford
MAURICE	Maurice Lisby	A MEDICINE MAN	Charles Benton
BOUEMANN	John Bouie		Betta Snyder
JEAN FRANÇOIS	Charles Benton	VOODOO DANCERS	Ruby Orange
BIASSOU	Oliver Grandi		Estelle Young
Director: Newton Hill.			

IT TAKES the author three long acts and seven scenes laid in an inn at Cap François, in a midnight forest, on a hill overlooking the sea, in the headquarters of the French command, and finally in the palace throne room not to tell dramatically the dramatic story of the legendary Haitian slave who helped to lead his people in a revolt against the French and who became the island king, only to kill himself when those whom he had liberated turned against him and his dictatorial manner of rule. It is a tale fraught with color and excitement, but out of it Hammerman, who has tried vainly to capture the dramaturgical drive and power of O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*, has managed to extract only a confused and static play full of peanut melodrama and tinsel star spangled speeches about Freedom. All that he has learned from O'Neill is a superficial employment of crescendo drums to heighten a suspense that

is otherwise non-existent. And all that he has not learned in turn from William du Bois' play on the same subject, called *Haiti* and produced by the late Federal Theatre Project some eight years ago, is that, while voodoo dances may be pictorially stimulating in their place, they can not be relied upon to create a tense dramatic stage atmosphere without some help from a dramatist.

The play, in short, talks itself out of the story's inherent life and in the talking confounds action further by meandering too often off-stage and conducting its drama out of sight and sound of the audience. In the leading role, Frederick O'Neal, who was so successful in the previous season's *Anna Lucasta*, got, with the playwright's aid, exactly nowhere.

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## KIT OF HOTEL MUM. JUNE 11, 1945

*A play by the Rev. Will W. Whalen. Produced by the author for 3 performances in the Barbizon-Plaza Theatre.*

### CAST

Esther Romaine, Mort C. Feinberg, Dianne Little, Ruth White, and Charles Townsen.

Director: Will W. Whalen.

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THE AUTHOR, according to *Who's Who in America*, is an Irish minister of the gospel operating in Orrtanna, Pennsylvania, and is listed as having written various books and plays bearing such titles as *The Celibate Father*, *The Ex-Nun*, *What Priests Never Tell*, *Scandal's Lash*, *The Virgin Queen's Daughter*, and *The Girl Who Fought*. Previous to the opening of his *Kit Of Hotel Mum*, I received the following letter from him:

"I do be wonderin' kin I lure and mislead ye up furteen blocks higher on Sixth Avenoo to our Barbizon-Plazzer Theaytre. You know you're a liberal eddication in drayma. Now, I amn't tryin' to jolly you. I wud in one minyute if I thunk I'd git away wid it. But ketch you lettin' me do that. So if I make breaks at ye, I'm honest annyhow.

"Me play this time ain't about the harlot wid the 'eart of gowld, tho' 'tis about an 'arlot. She is one rip! But she has sense to her. When her baby dies, she says: 'God, today I realize I could have been a good woman!' And her head is on straight, tho' her morals do sag crookedly. She warns the gangster: 'Better keep your legs crossed, Tony; you might give birt' to a mess of mischief.' Tony and hersel' run true to form throughout. He's one card! When he loins that his wife and the whore both bear him a child in the same week, do he swoon? 'Ketch me doin' it!' saith him. He preens and does a John Barrymore: 'Evidently I'm fertile!' And he lets both women take good care of their infants widout his intrusion wid a five-spot.



"But the climax proves the whore the bigger. She and Tony meet their death. He goes wid tail betune the leg-gins; she wid chin up. She cracks: 'If the angels don't gag me, I'm goin' to ast God why in hell He ever made a damn fool like me!' Then in her last agony she makes a frantic grab for the crucifix: 'Me Jesus, mercy!' And God always does have mercy on such poor lil' critters. In this case God is wise enough to let her die. The wife reads Ibsen. Kit the whore luves the *Police Gazette* — many a fine buck she laid out! But me piece do not like ould Henrik's trot out a lot of murderin' hard questions on the stage and then give ye no answers. This here play is the pictorial papers put behindst the foots. Now are ye puttin' on your rubbers to come to see us or to take a sneak off on us?"

The choice was the sneak off on us.

## THE PRIVATE LIFE OF THE MASTER RACE

JUNE 12, 1945

*A documentary play by Berthold Brecht, translated by Eric Russel Bentley, with incidental music by Hanns Eisler. Produced by the Theatre Of All Nations group for 6 performances in the City College Pauline Edwards Theatre.*

## PRINCIPALS

Albert Basserman, Clarence Derwent, Paul Andor, Dwight Marfield, Vilma Kurer, Elaine Strich, William Malten, Lothar Rewalt, Else Basserman, Hester Sondergard, Ludwig Roth, Elizabeth Neumann, Eda Reiss-Merin, Klaus Kolmar, John A. Topa, Brainerd Duffield, Margaret Bell, Maurice Ellis, and Robert Penn.

Director: *Berthold Viertel.*

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**B**RECHT, little known to the American stage save for his play, *Mother*, shown briefly a decade ago, and for his libretto treatment of Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (*The Three-Penny Opera*), was a conspicuous playwright in the Berlin theatre of the pre-Hitler period. His conspicuousness proceeded, apart from the mentioned opera, largely from his inordinate social indignation, his gift for putting it into terms that made an unusual amount of theatrical noise, and his penchant for the kind of dramatic experimentation that made an even greater amount of noise, which perhaps reflexedly augmented his exasperation. Roughly speaking, he was to be described as a mixture of John Howard Lawson, Clifford Odets and Elmer Rice, with a liberal sprinkling of John Philip Sousa for good measure. That he indicated a share of dramatic talent was plain, but that he most often buried it under an avalanche of personal umbrage was even plainer. His *Drums In The Night*, a tirade against war profiteers, for example, suffocated what virtues it possessed in its own hot steam. His *The Measure*, for another, waved the red flag of Communism so violently that

at times it obscured what trenchant writing was in the background. And his *Mother*, for still another, espoused the cause of the workers with such an excess of radical vigor that it finally collapsed from a self-induced exhaustion.

A refugee from Nazism, Brecht's reintroduction of himself to America with this *The Private Life Of The Master Race* discloses him to be still a playwright whose indignations, understandable as they in this instance are, have overpowered him as a dramatic artist. Originally written in seventeen scenes, some of only a few minutes' duration and some of exaggerated length, the exhibit has been cut down to nine since its initial showing in the theatre of the University of California. These retail in what are essentially flashbacks those episodes in the lives of nine soldiers on the way to the front which explain the germination and development of the Nazi movement. Most of them are of recognizable elements: anti-Semitism, Gestapo spying, political persecution, etc., and they are hardly helped theatrically by bridging them with such devices as fanatical Nazi propaganda speeches over a loud speaker, ear-splitting renditions of the Horst Wessel song, and the like.

In only one or two of the sections, notably one called *The Informer* wherein the parents of a Hitler Youth child wildly suspect that he is spying upon them and about to report on their conversations to the Gestapo, and perhaps another called *In Search Of Justice*, which resorts relievingly to a little sardonic humor, is the familiar made to seem slightly less so through relatively lively treatment. The rest, including the non-Aryan wife separated from her husband, the impressment of men into labor battalions, the indignities visited upon prisoners in a concentration camp, and so on, amount simply to a fluttering of now yellowed newspapers.

It is apparent that Brecht has tried hard to accommodate his style, at least in part, to the theatre of another land, but the old German stage is still too deep in his blood to permit him the necessary departure. He retains some power as a dramatist, but it is more the power of lungs than of the spirit.

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Hanns Eisler, who was previously known for his musical contributions to the before-mentioned *Mother* and to Odets' *Night Music* and Saul's and Hays' *Medicine Show*, did nothing on this occasion any more greatly to distinguish himself; and the direction by Berthold Viertel and the acting were of the sort that would have been hooted out of even the German provincial Wandertheater of thirty-eight years ago.

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## OH, BROTHER! JUNE 19, 1945

*A comedy by Jacques Deval. Produced by Maximilian Becker and Peter Warren for 23 performances in the Royale Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

ALLEN KILMER	Don Gibson	AMELIA BROADWELL
SUE ATKINS	Susana Garnett	Catherine Doucet
CHARLES CRADDOCK	Hugh Herbert	STEVE FOLEY
ETHEL SHORES	Eva Condon	JULIAN TRUMBULL
ROSE	Sally Archdeacon	CONNIE ROWLAND
LARRY	Kendall Bryson	JOAN MASSUBER
MARION COSGROVE	Arleen Whelan	Gloria Stroock

**SYNOPSIS:** *The study at the Cosgrove home, Daytona Beach, Fla. Time. The present, July. Act I. Scene 1. Sunday. Scene 2. Same day, later. Act II. Scene 1. A week later. Scene 2. Same night. Act III. Next morning, Sunday.*

Director: *Bretaigne Windust.*

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**D**EVAL, before leaving his native France and coming to this country where all men are free and equal until they go to Hollywood and suffer a reduction in status, wrote some amusing comedies. Among them were *A Weak Woman*, *Mademoiselle*, *Her Cardboard Lover*, and *Tovarich*, the last three of which were successfully transferred to the American stage. It was not long after he had settled his talents in Hollywood, however, that they began to show the usual effects, and the plays he has written since then have not only been critically worthless but, upon their stage revelation, have been promptly and appropriately consigned to the storehouse.

The first indication that he had been infected with the Hollywood pox was an exhibit called *A Broom For The Bride*, which was displayed on the West Coast with the movie actress, Irene Rich, in the leading role and which was so bad that it was yanked off in the middle of its second week. The operations of the pox were next visible in

a play named *Lorelei*, which was in turn removed from the New York stage at the end of one week. The further inroads made by the disease were subsequently evident in something called *Boudoir*, which was such outrageous drivel that New York audiences jeered it into the discard after eleven disastrous performances. And now the mortal nature of the affliction is to be discerned, and clearly, in this polyp called *Oh, Brother!*

Anyone who would name a play *Oh, Brother!* would be suspect in the first place. Such things are no longer done in polite theatrical society. They belong to the now remote era of the Princess and other musical show stages and of *Oh, Boy!*, *Oh, Kay!*, *Oh, Lady, Lady!*, *Oh, Please!*, etc., and to the equally remote period of such plays as *Oh, Mama!*, *Oh, Professor!* and the like, all automatically criticized by their own exclamation points.

But Deval doesn't stop there. Aside from evidently believing in his innocent French way that a title like *Oh, Brother!* still amounts to very fresh and saucy American lingo, he seems further to be persuaded that the plot about a group of crooks redeemed by pure love or something of the sort is similarly hot off the griddle. It is possible that the news has not yet reached Hollywood, but plays about redeemed crooks have been a drug on the market since *Turn To The Right* more than a quarter-century ago took all future edge off them. It gradually became so, indeed, what with the plot putting in an appearance at what seemed monthly intervals, that the moment an audience observed one or more crooks on a stage it correctly anticipated that it was expected to waste two hours until they would duly see the light through the instrumentality of a gentle and trusting old lady who made wonderful apple pies, or a virgin in a white dress whose worldly activities seemed to center entirely upon picking field daisies and inserting them tenderly into her deceased father's shaving mug, or an actor who looked like Walter Hampden, dressed like David Belasco, and believed in God, audibly.

Yet not even there does the guileless Deval rest. Though he inserts his virgin in one act into a Hollywood swim

suit by way of a little novelty and omits the daisies, he adds to the antiquated plot for extra measure the almost equally antiquated one of the young man palmed off by the crooks as the family's missing heir, which again made its paraphrased appearance only last season in the fricassee called *The Visitor*. And he brings along with it the old business of the impostor's planted familiarity with the decorations in the missing heir's bedroom, the crooked lawyer, the suspicions as to the impostor's identity, and everything else save only latter's betrayingly absent birthmark.

The Deval humor is strictly in line with his materials. In an effort to prove that he is chummy with the American scene, he cracks nifties about Peoria, peddles wiseys about *Forever Amber*, refers to a mink coat as skunk, observes that if a woman's scant bathing costume shrinks one wouldn't notice any difference, hides a whiskey bottle in the bookcase, and indulges in the phrase "little stinker."

Deval is not the only foreigner who has come to this country and who in the hope of box-office prosperity has tried to pass himself off as one handily conversant with the American way of things. There have been many of the foolish fellows. Instead of writing about characters and customs they intimately know, they absurdly horn into a completely alien field and delude only themselves with the results. We thus in recent seasons have had Englishmen confecting plays about life on a Long Island that has been peopled chiefly by descendants of St. John Hankin's Lady Faringford and of Henry Arthur Jones' butlers. We thus further have had refugee Germans and Austrians merchenting such American vernacular as has driven Damon Runyon in desperation to a Choctaw source-book. And we thus have and have had Frenchmen like this Deval writing of American crooks in the terms that used to make American tourists in Paris chuckle indecorously when they engaged their counterparts in such caricatures as the adapted *Le Mystérieux Jimmy (Alias Jimmy Valentine)* at the Renaissance and as the Messrs. Bisson's and Livet's *Nick Carter* at the Ambigu.

The lethal critical reception of the exhibit was of the

tenor that leads Hollywood folk in general to argue that the theatre and its reviewers are prejudiced against them, and that even if they wrote plays superior to Aristophanes' and purveyed acting excelling Salvini's or Duse's they would arbitrarily have to take it on the chin. If, as they believe, the theatre and the critics have come to be prejudiced against them, they have only themselves to blame. For the established fact is that at least nine-tenths of them, far from being Aristophaneses, Salvinis or Duses, save perhaps in the eccentric esteem of Hollywood, are writers of simon-pure rubbish and, in the matter of acting, several cuts below even the poorer grade of our stage players. The small remaining tenth, however, should persuade these rank incompetents that the prejudice exists only for such as themselves and that it promptly turns to warm goodwill when any acceptable talents show up. There thus certainly have been no faintest signs of prejudice in the case of a Margaret Sullavan on the dramatic stage or in that of a Jan Clayton on the musical. The receptions of both, in the instance of the critics and the theatre public, have been all that they might desire. They have deserved praise, and they have got it, fully and without stint. Nor are they by any means alone. Ruth Hussey, Spencer Tracy, Virginia Weidler, Ralph Bellamy, Fredric March, Paul Muni, Irene Manning, Virginia Gilmore, K. T. Stevens and various others have received a no less courteous consideration than dyed-in-the-wool, steadfast stage players, even, indeed, when on occasion some of them did not seem to deserve it.

But as against one Hollywood actor or actress who proves equal to the demands of the stage we are confronted by a dozen or more who are wholly and even ridiculously unfitted, and it is these who, when they suffer the consequences, spread the legend of intolerance. And helping them are the screen writers who have ventured to unload their ideas of playwriting, who have mistaken screen claptrap for reputable drama, and who have been duly and properly egged back to where they came from.

No Hollywood playwright who has contributed to the theatre even fairly acceptable material has been accorded



anything but an honest deal. The authors of *Snafu* and of *Chicken Every Sunday* surely have small complaint, nor have the authors of *Dear Ruth*, *Tomorrow The World*, and *Deep Are The Roots*. Only Vincent Lawrence has a grievance coming in the case of his *The Overtons*, but he often had the same grievance coming in connection with several of the plays which he wrote in the days long before he went to Hollywood. The circumstance that he has since become a denizen of Hollywood has had nothing to do with the attitude of some of the critics toward him.

There are, however, innumerable other Hollywood boys and girls who have richly deserved the stings of criticism and the public apathy which have been meted out to them. But the stings and the apathy have been no less their portion than that of their non-Hollywood equivalents who similarly have invaded the theatre with meritricious wares. If F. Hugh Herbert believes that he got an undeserved break with his trashy *For Keeps*, he can not, surely, have the slightest fault to find with the break he got with *Kiss And Tell*, which was amusing, which was endorsed by the critics, and which played successfully to a concurring public for more than two years. If, on the other hand, such Hollywood scribblers as Frederick Jackson with his *Slightly Scandalous*, Jane Hinton with her *Meet A Body*, Edward Caulfield with his *And Be My Love*, Edward Chodorov with his *Those Endearing Young Charms*, *Decision* and *Common Ground*, and other such movie persons as the authors of *Lower North*, *Star Spangled Family*, *Marriage Is For Single People*, *Too Hot For Maneuvers*, *The Ryan Girl*, etc., — if these imagine they have a kick coming on the score of any such caseous junk, they are right, and should bend over and prepare to receive it.

They are not, however, for all their theory of local hostility and prejudice, any different in this respect from writers who have never been within a thousand miles of Hollywood. The identical boots have been bestowed upon many such non-movie merchants of balderdash as the authors of *A Strange Play*, *Last Stop*, *The Odds On Mrs. Oakley*, *No*

*Way Out, The Secret Room, A Place Of Our Own, Brighten The Corner*, and a sufficient package of others.

To expect hospitality for any such Paramount picture company subsidized derivative dung as *Oh, Brother!* was accordingly beyond reason's bounds. Hollywood or not Hollywood, drama criticism, even if it held its nose, could not swallow it. Nor could it swallow such Hollywood members of its acting company as Hugh Herbert, who mistook a theatre stage for one on a motion picture lot and who, though he worked like a Trojan, found that the horse was on him, and as Arleen Whelan who, after the very creditable impression which under George Kaufman's slyly expert direction she had previously made in *The Doughgirls*, on this occasion would not have gratified the fancy of even a Samuel Goldwyn or a Darryl Zanuck.

## THE WIND IS NINETY. JUNE 21, 1945

*A play by Ralph Nelson. Produced by the Messrs. Shubert, in association with Albert de Courville, for 108 cut-rate performances and a 75,000 dollar loss in the Booth Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

NANA	Blanche Yurka	ERNIE SHEFFIELD	
JOAN	Joyce Van Patten		Dickie Van Patten
TOMMY	Roy Sterling	DAN	Wendell Corey
JIMMY	Kevin Mathews	SOLDIER	Kirk Douglas
CHRIS	Donald Devlin	BOY	Marty Miller
BERT	Teddy Rose	YOUTH	James Dobson
DOC RITCHIE	Bert Lytell	YOUNG MAN	Henry Barnard
MR. WHEELER	Scott Moore	2ND LIEUTENANT	
JEAN	Frances Reid		Gordon McDonald

SYNOPSIS: Act I. *The front lawn of a home. Late afternoon of a summer's day.* Act II. *Early afternoon of next day.* Act III. *Later that afternoon.*

Director: Albert de Courville.

SOME THIRTY-ODD YEARS AGO, as noted in *The Theatre Book Of The Year, 1942-43*, Lee Shubert, in company with his associates, became highly excited over a play called *The Nazarene*, by Hal Reid. Along with his partners he produced it, preliminary to a New York engagement which he was certain would be a long and enormously prosperous one, in Newark, New Jersey, and on the opening night there entered the theatre beaming expansively over his prospective gold-mine. His beam, however and alas, was not to last long. Just as the first curtain was about to rise, an inconsiderate Broadway kibitzer who had rushed gleefully to the scene apprised him that his presumptive mint had been shown exactly two years before in New York in the Murray Hill Theatre under the title *The Light Of The World*, that the audience had walked out on it on the opening night, that the critics had tarred and feathered it the next morning, and that it was one of the direst failures of its season.

In this season Mr. Shubert became even more extravagantly enthusiastic about the play here considered and put it on in the Booth Theatre. Though it got a few favorable reviews, it got more that were very far from that and it expired after a desperately forced and unrewarding engagement. Mr. S. was grievously disappointed and couldn't understand why most of the critics and the public at large were not as wild over the virtues of the play as he was, since he was convinced that it was a new, fresh, vital, and eminently original treatment of the war-dead theme.

I observed our friend all aglow in the lobby of the Booth on the opening night. He appeared to be sure that the play was all he thought it was and that it would prove to be a bonanza. Since my manners are hardly those of the ignominious kibitzer who took the wind out of his sails those thirty-odd years ago, I refrained from putting my arm around his shoulders and confiding to him what he seemed peculiarly to have forgotten. To wit, that just fifteen years and six months before he had put on in the Forty-ninth Street Theatre a play called *Thunder In The Air*, by one Robins Millar, which was a counterpart of this *The Wind Is Ninety*, which found its first night audience completely apathetic, which got notices the next morning that were an augury of its fate, and which closed after only sixteen performances.

In both plays a dead soldier comes back to earth and appears to the different members of his family as each of them best remembers him. In both plays the theme, familiar since the days of *The Return Of Peter Grimm* thirty-four years ago, is that the dead do not die but live on in the memories and thoughts of the living. In both, the chief characters are the deceased's mother, father and sweetheart, and a young girl and small boy. In both, the lights are dimmed in the various recollection scenes, the business of the deceased's endeavors to make himself understood are something of a piece, and the latter comports himself in such wise that one gets the impression that he died not in combat but from paresis. The one and only difference is that the defunct pro-

tagonist in the earlier play is not so sentimentally virtuous as in the later.

These plays about the dead who return to earth, and of which the theatre in the last three decades has had a luxuriant cargo, commonly take one of two forms. In the first, as in such as the before noted *The Return Of Peter Grimm* and — *But Not Goodbye*, the interred come back to straighten out and set to rights their households' difficulties, customarily brought about by scoundrels intent upon swindling the old homesteads out of valuable properties left by the late lamented. And in the second, as in such as *Miracle At Verdun* and *Bury The Dead*, they return oratorically to inculcate in those whom they have left behind the perfidiousness and futility of wars.

In most cases, particularly in the first form, the defunct have a time of it trying, as they invariably express it, to "get through" to the living and communicate their thoughts to them, which, in view of the fact that the defunct are often played by robust hams with voices like foghorns, impresses the more realistic in the audience as moderately whimsical. This effort to "get through" in turn also usually takes two forms. In one, the telepathic medium is a small child, sometimes perfectly well but more frequently with face liberally sprinkled with rice powder to indicate either his physical and spiritual delicacy or his imminent death from tuberculosis. In the other, it is an adult loved one, preferably a wife or a mother, whose sensitivity is of such proportions that the mere fluttering of a window curtain or a faint peal of distant thunder induces in her a rapport with the beyond immeasurably surpassing that of Sir Oliver Lodge or Madame Blavatsky. Nelson's play, the latest in the series, falls not alone into the first or the second group and in one of its subdivisions but in all of them at one and the same time, and with something of a thud.

Inexperienced in the writing of drama — his only previous known effort was a one-act play, *Mail Call*, produced two seasons back — the author, a captain in the air forces, has not yet learned that, save the playwright be Shaw, talk is valuable only in so far as it furthers dramatic action. He

additionally has not learned that fantasy consists in something a little more than the manipulation of an electrical switchboard; that if you tell your whole play in the first act an audience will have small reason to linger for the next two; that a stage full of children, as stage children's articulation goes these days, offers a serious challenge to intelligibility, to say nothing of an audience's nerves; and that such lines as "You would bring a child into the world at times like these?", such characters as the small-town postman who knows what is in all the letters, and such humor as consists in a small boy's writing a letter in which "friend" is spelled "fiend" are not especially the juices out of which acceptable drama is distilled. And his dubious choice of words and his arrangement of them throughout his play further lays him open to the charge of being violently anti-semantic.

The stage setting by Frederick Fox showing a house and tree-studded lawn offered a sufficiency of artificial foliage and artificial flowers to equip a half-dozen combined productions of *Blossom Time*, *Maytime*, *Magnolia*, and *The Warrens Of Virginia*. And the acting was equally fragrant.

Come the hot weather months and what is termed by Equity statute the art of acting takes in the aggregate what is termed in less highfalutin circles a prattfall. Let the thermometer rise even to eighty and stages seem suddenly to become stricken with the kind of performances which are identified with the memories of Corse Payton, Creston Clarke, and Adele Blood. Just why this should be fascinates the student, since temperature hardly affects temperament in other branches of artistic endeavor. Michelangelo carved the most difficult portions of his matchless David, history informs us, under a sun so broiling that three menials constantly had to operate fans upon him. Dante wrote the finest passages of his masterpiece in a period of the year so torrid that he now and then had to dip his perspiring hand into cool water to reinspirit it with enough vigor to go on. Raphael painted his famous *Transfiguration* in weather so steamy that he frequently had to interrupt his work and plunge his head into a bathtub. Earl Wilson

doesn't miss a single bosom all through June, July and August. Yet an actor with an artistic task no more arduous than coming on, leaning against the piano and exclaiming, "My dear, you should have seen what Hortense had on at lunch today!", once the summer heat appears goes to such pieces that even he is occasionally seized with a mild apprehension as to his histrionic genius. It is barely possible that he may not only be able to get through an opening night performance without falling down but may even be able to acquit himself in such wise that the critics will not throw broccoli at him. Comes the next night, however, and he and his colleagues disintegrate to such a degree that the audience doesn't know whether it is in a theatre or a mortuary, and usually isn't helped out of its perplexity by the smell of the play.

The company merchanting the exhibit under immediate consideration managed to get through the first performance with no more seasonal symptoms than streams of perspiration so profuse that for a time the audience thought it was viewing a revival of *Rain*. But soon thereafter, I was informed, most of it looked as if it had rehearsed in a Chinese laundry, and acted accordingly.

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 ORPHÉE. JUNE 27, 1945

*A play by Jean Cocteau, translation by Carl Wildman. Produced by the Provincetown Summer Theatre, Inc., for 16 performances in the Provincetown Theatre.*

ORPHÉE	<i>Les Mahoney</i>	RAPHAEL	<i>Frank Dale</i>
EURYDICE	<i>Paz Davila</i>	AZRAEL	<i>John Leighton</i>
HORSE	<i>Himself</i>	COMMISSIONER OF POLICE	
HEURTEBISE	<i>Reed Martin</i>		<i>Michael Kopcha</i>
DEATH	<i>Marie de Wolfe</i>	SCRIVENER	<i>Lawrence Arthur</i>
Director: <i>Joann Straus.</i>			

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**F**IRST INFLICTED upon the susceptible Paris of twenty years ago, the spectacle was hatched by Cocteau while under the influence of opium. Its planned effect upon an audience is unhappily less that of opium than of a hammer assiduously applied to the audience's skull. Not alone does the thing make no sense whatsoever; it makes no play. The impression is of a child simultaneously trying to assimilate the fable of Orpheus and Eurydice, Strindberg's *The Spook Sonata*, and the book of Ed Wynn's old show, *Simple Simon*, meanwhile sucking frantically at a bottle of wood alcohol and making faces like Salvador Dali.

Involved in the stew are a domestic sexual triangle consisting of a man, a woman and a horse, a glazier who has a pair of window-panes fastened to his shoulders and who thinks he is an angel, a marble bust that breaks into speech, a brace of mirrors that serve as doors, a cargo of poisoned sugar, and a papier-mâché head which is severed from the protagonist's body and left upright at stage center when the latter makes its final exit.

The amateurs subsequently offered for twelve performances a revival of Synge's admirable *The Playboy Of The Western World*, but the spirit of Cocteau seemed to have insinuated itself into it and one momentarily expected to



see old Mahon appear with sheets of plate-glass attached to his ears and Christy kissing a horse.

The group's third item, presented on August 2 for a brief engagement, was Rodney Ackland's *Strange Orchestra*, a Piccadilly excursion into the Chekhovian metaphysic and of small, if any, critical value. The natural confusion of the acting company was echoed by its management, which seemed from its announcements to believe that the play was the product not of Ackland, who is a well-known member of the younger English playwriting set, but of someone named Ackman. The management's further confusion led it to believe that this was the first time the play had been produced in America. It had been produced on Broadway eleven years before.

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## AS YOU LIKE IT. JULY 3, 1945

*A modernized version of the Shakespeare comedy by John Burgess and Beverly Bush. Produced by the latter for 6 performances in the President Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

ROSALIND	Margretta Ramsey	SYLVIVS	David Rogers
CELIA	Marian Hall	OLIVER	Scott Kennedy
TOUCHSTONE	Norman Budd	DUKE SENIOR	Leon Forbes
MADAME LEBEAU	Gertrude Kinnell	WIFE	Marcena Woerner
DUKE FREDERICK	Edward Kreisler	JACQUES	George L. Headley
ORLANDO	John Burgess	AUDREY	Beverly Bush
ADAM	Ted Field	WILLIAM	Stanley Jennings
PHOEBE	Nancy Hoadley		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 2. *Courtyard of the Duke Frederick.*  
 Scene 2. *A bedroom in the palace.* Scene 3. *Courtyard of Oliver's house.*  
 Act II. Scene 1. *Forest of Arden.* Scene 2. *The same.* Act III. Scene 1.  
*Forest of Arden.* Scene 2. *The same.*

Director: John Burgess.

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**I**T HAS LONG BEEN the persuasion of amateurs that *As You Like It* is remarkably adapted to their modest competences. As a result, we have had numerous performances of the comedy that have lacked almost everything it calls for. The notion that because its leading characters are in the greener years young people may simply on the score of their age handsomely act them is obviously as quizzical as that actors of such advanced years that they already have one foot in the grave are most ideally suited to play Lear, Vincentio, and Gobbo père, or on the distaff side Queen Elinor, Volumentia, and Juliet's nurse. If any of the Shakespeare plays demands acting experience and developed talent, *As You Like It* is assuredly one of them, since its recognized many absurdities and weaknesses have need of the cover and deception of graduated acting and since in the hands of novices they become doubly emphasized.

Another conviction of the tyros is that by playing tricks

with the play — such as modern or freak costuming, the artifice known as streamlining, eccentric settings and even more eccentric staging — the amateurishness of the presentation will be camouflaged and be made passable. It does not, alas, quite work out as hoped. If the lines are not spoken with a tongue to charm; if the players, youth or no youth, are not of sufficient grace and eye-appeal; if that professional touch which is so vital to a play as tenuous and defective as this is absent, all the newfangledness from here to Moscow and all the adolescence from here to Hollywood will not suffice to put a likely face on it.

The present players, largely recruited from the University of Washington in Seattle, as similar ambitious amateurs in the past have succumbed to the fallacy of their ilk and for all their resolute intentions have found themselves in the usual predicament. They have streamlined the comedy from its five acts and twenty-two scenes to three acts and seven scenes and have omitted several of the characters; they have dressed it in men's gymnasium shorts and girls' equivalents; they have set it with flats that resemble nursery cut-outs; and they have otherwise put their hearts and collegiate talents into it. But it still takes the Ada Rehans, Julia Marlowes, John Drews, Frank Worthings or their equals to make the evening what it should be.

## AN EVENING WITH GEORGE BERNARD

SHAW. JULY 13, 1945

*A bill made up of Shaw's The Dark Lady Of The Sonnets, Over-Ruled, and How He Lied To Her Husband. Produced by the Washington Square Players for one performance in the New York University Auditorium.*

## PLAYERS

Emma Knox, Marian Primont, Baldwin McGaw, and Albert Quinton.  
Director: Randolph Somerville.

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**R**E-EMERGING for a single appearance after three years of inactivity, the little group of Washington Square Players brought their resources to the trio of minor Shaw efforts noted and, while the performance was of an inconsiderable nature, the coincident re-emergence of Shaw after the local theatre's later day neglect of him provided, despite the inferiority of the selections, a touch of that brio which John Bull's other islander even in his lesser dramatic self has seldom failed to impart to a stage so often in need of it.

May God in His infinite wisdom spare the grand old boy to us for many another year but, since mathematics seem to be inexorable in the scheme of Divine Providence and since he is now ninety, the Great Bookkeeper may have other ideas. It is this unhappy thought that prompts, while he is still alive, an all too brief reckoning of what he has meant, among so many other things, to the world of drama.

When in his earlier day as a critic Shaw looked upon the English stage, what he found, in the plays of Pinero, was simply a romantic servant-girl's view of sex made palatable to her even more romantic employers by identifying it with persons of a somewhat fancier social class. What he found further, in the plays of Henry Arthur Jones, though he deemed him Pinero's superior, was a relationship of men and women predicated solely upon its availability for ready

theatrical effect, and a philosophy of that relationship facetiously concocted by placing a sliver of banana peel under Pinero's moral rectitude. What he found yet further, despite the strong wind beginning to blow down from Norway, was a drama still artificialized out of all reality by French influences. What he found in sum and in short was an English stage which interpreted life largely in terms of the powdered mentalities and evening dressed emotions of high-life puppets or in the even more laughable terms of paper-knife melodrama.

Since critic and crusader are generally one and the same, for all the critic's customary lofty disdain of the impeachment, the disgusted Shaw didn't wait long before exchanging his critical robes for playwriting armor and, his red whiskers breezing behind him, riding forth to battle. With the earlier help of his fellow-critic Archer he drew first blood, if but a dribble, from the heathen by heaving onto the stage of the Independent Theatre Company of London *Widowers' Houses* which, though paradoxically imitative of the very drama he was tilting against, dared to introduce sociology and economics into the hitherto sacrosanct drawing-room. This was the start, modest enough, but the start nonetheless of the putsch that was to revolutionize not only the modern drama of England but to a considerable degree the drama of the rest of the civilized world.

It was not, however, too easy going. The English were still happily swooning over the pretty parlor woes of Mrs. Tanqueray and her sisters when Shaw had at them with the ironic whimsicalities of *Arms and the Man*, which they appreciated only as a stage Russian pretends to relish licorice-pellet caviar, and, unforgivably, with *Mrs. Warren's Profession* which, while essentially not altogether dissimilar to Mrs. Tanqueray's, nevertheless so outraged the British morality that its production was forbidden.

Chuckling in his beard, Shaw thereupon said to himself, very well, if the numskulls prefer sentimentality, I shall give it to them, but in such clever and witty wise that they will not recognize the deletion of the *ality*. *Candida*, that most adroit of sentimental comedies, was the result. And

slowly, like a tortoise making for a lily pond, the English public began to respond. And slowly its esteem for Pinero's innocent young women whose reputations had been knavishly stained (*The Benefit Of The Doubt*) and less innocent older ones who melodramatically burned Bibles by way of justifying their illicit relations with politicians (*The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith*) began faintly to fade. Nor did Jones' Michaels and their lost angels or Wilde's ideal husbands bring the color wholly back to its cheeks. For Shaw, not dismounting from his charger for a moment, kept prodding sardonically with lances like *The Devil's Disciple*, which invited audiences to bring with them into the theatre fewer glands and more brains and which pleasantly surprised them by being not at all as painful as they had anticipated but, on the contrary, surprisingly amusing.

From this point on Shaw's crusade was, as the vulgar Yankee expression has it, pretty well in the bag. It was not that the English, who steadfastly worship anything old, whether a philosophy, an actress or a bathroom, deserted *en masse* the dramatic order of yesterday. Very far from it. The Episcopalian indiscretions of lords and manicurists (*The Gay Lord Quex*), the Lake Como moonlit adventurings of elegant strumpets (*Iris*), the spectacle of cross-examined "good" women battling to preserve their honor (*Mrs. Dane's Defence*), the necklaces of Mrs. Gorringer, the amatory maneuvers of Jane, and the various princesses and butterflies still exercised their perfumed influence. But that influence was not exactly the puissant thing it once was. And gradually and surely it was to become less and less so under the Shavian pressure. And where in several other and more progressive countries it had not been earlier recognized, it was now not long before St. George was hailed as the voice in the dramatic wilderness, and the prophet of the new dramatic order.

Having already produced the beautifully witty *Caesar and Cleopatra* on a stage chronologically identified with the sweetly-cologned *The Gay Lord Quex*, Shaw forthwith pitched in in earnest. *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*, after a lapse in *The Admirable Bashville*, was followed by

*John Bull's Other Island* and that by Major Barbara, *The Philanderer*, and *Man and Superman*, the three last produced in a single year. Scarcely had audiences recaptured their wind than *The Doctor's Dilemma* was heaved at them, and then in quick succession *Getting Married* (*The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet* suffered a deferred production), *Misalliance*, and *Fanny's First Play*. And, not so very long afterward, *You Never Can Tell* and *Pygmalion* and, to the bewilderment of any possible remaining doubters, that most remarkable of modern historical fancies, *Saint Joan*.

Shaw's position as the greatest dramatist in the English-speaking theatre of his time was now secure. Nor could that security be minimized by his later and enfeebled work. Though his *The Apple Cart*, *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles*, *Too True To Be Good*, *Back To Methuselah*, *Geneva*, *In Good King Charles' Golden Days*, etc., marked a clearly visible and here and there sorry decline, there were still traces of the real Shaw detectable in them. And at their worst, save in the case of *Geneva*, they were better than the overwhelming majority of plays that emanated from the English theatre in the same period.

It was not, throughout his theatrical career, that Shaw was the revolutionary dramatic thinker he was esteemed to be by critics and audiences given to a confounding of impudent intelligence with a quietly reasoned and profound philosophy. Much of what was accepted as daring had already long been tried and tested when Shaw offered it. It was rather that he had the great ability to restate platitudes in such a manner that their weariness left them and that they took on again the color of youth. He brought with him many of the old stage toys but he painted them up in such brilliant and dashing colors that they seemed new. He laughed at the old conventions of the drama, nevertheless kept them and, by playing his wit over them, gaily deceived his willing customers that they were right out of the band-box. And, above all, he had the enormous theatrical skill to make cynicism a merry thing.

Gratuitously to analyze his plays too closely is to look the gift horse in the mouth, for they have given their recipients

some of the happiest hours the stage has afforded them since their earliest birthdays. *Caesar and Cleopatra* overdoes the business of deriding the British? Perhaps so, but it nonetheless remains the best play of its kind written in Shaw's time. The epilogue of *Saint Joan* is greasepaint humbug? True, but the play remains the best play of its kind in that same time. *Fanny's First Play* is on the trivial side? Again true, but where a better and more hilarious trivial one? The Life Force business of *Man and Superman* and the pursuit of man by woman is out of Schopenhauer, with a bow to Nietzsche for the Superman business? So what? Maybe the play as a whole isn't plentifully superior to it?

I am not offering definitive criticism; I am offering definitive appreciation of dramatic and theatrical favors. I may deplore with the more definitively critical and worthy P. P. Howe Shaw's admiration for confusing such a character's name as Mr. Redbrook with Mr. Kidbrook or Ftatateeta with Teetatota and, with Howe, condemn it equally with Wilde's having named a character Kelvil in order to be able later on to call him Kettle (or even equally with Shakespeare's bequeathal of the name Elbow to subsequent punning ends), but since it occupies only eight seconds out of two otherwise amusing hours, I shall not complain too loudly. I may also make a wry critical face over the old vaudeville funny business of a woman getting drunk, but *Candida* is *Candida* just the same. I may professionally yelp a little when the great Catherine rolls around on the floor like a pair of 1890 German and Irish comedians, but the short play is pretty entertaining in spite of it. I may groan a bit over such undergraduate pleasantries, so Howe terms them, as "No man is a match for a woman except with a poker and a pair of hobnailed boots," but there are a hundred such compensating lines as "Captain Bluntschli, I am very glad to see you; but you must leave this house at once" or as "Life does not cease to be funny when people die any more than it ceases to be serious when people laugh." And I may, as a critic who gets paid for it, frown gravely over any number of other obvious shortcomings in the great old boy's plays but, as a man who doesn't get paid for it, I smile



and laugh and moisten at so much that is otherwise in them that I nevertheless kiss him on both cheeks.

There is that word "moisten." It would take a pretty tough character, or a *Viola tricolor*, to resist Shaw at his sentimental best, for in that best there is a world of tender wisdom distilled into some of the most beautiful prose that the modern stage has known. Caesar's speech to Cleopatra . . . Candida's gentle philosophy . . . Dubedat's bequest to Jennifer — these and a dozen, two dozen, others confound the criticism that once, and then seemingly not with merit, held Shaw to have a heart compounded half of second-hand Butler and half, in Wells' phrase, of parthenogenetic eggs.

And so when it comes to sex. The Shaw who once said, "There is never any real sex in romance; what is more, there is very little, and that of a very crude kind, in ninety-nine hundredths of our married life"; the Shaw who observed "One man's poetry is another man's pruriency"; the Shaw who asked, "Is any treatment of sex in the interest of public morals?"; the Shaw who remarked, "The novel which says no more about sex than may be said in a lecture on the facts to a class of school-girls of fifteen can be enormously more entertaining than a novel wholly preoccupied with sexual symptoms" — the Shaw who has uttered such beliefs has trouble explaining himself to the Shaw who, albeit perhaps unwittingly, has created some of the most desirable heroines that the modern stage has shown. It is his paradox that his own passivity has created warmth in other men. Though he often hopes to write brilliantly of women as if they were so many lamps without shades, the softening shades are nonetheless born of his prose. And of his own irrepressible sentiment no less.

Dick Dudgeon in *The Devil's Disciple* pronounces the word *love* "with true Puritan scorn," Mrs. Bridgenorth in *Getting Married* comments on the "everyday vulgarities of earthly love," and so with many another of his mouthpieces. But, as Stevenson hinted long ago to William Archer, Shaw was nevertheless born a romantic and continues to be one to this day. And, as I myself observed years ago, his romanticism is no more clearly to be detected than through such

of his animadversions on love and sex. He pretends not to see the latter for what they are and for what, deep inside him, he knows them to be. But all the fine irony and humor which he has visited upon them can not conceal the romanticist hiding behind that irony and humor and slyly through them seeking to protect himself from the charge. If the author of the rare and beautiful letters to Ellen Terry is not one of the most deeply romantic natures of his time and if he was not then, psychologically speaking, one who cunningly dismissed sex only and simply because he wished to safeguard his pride and disappointment in the presence of his successful rival, Irving — if Shaw was not and is not all of that, these observations are those of a two-year-old, and a backward one.

The great man is nearing the threshold of the hereafter. The theatre has not seen his like before, and will not see it soon again. He has brought to it a merry courage, a glorious wit, a musical tenderness, and a world of needed vitality. He has laughed at the old gods and, to give them their due, the old gods have enjoyed it. And outside and beyond the theatre he has let a wholesome breeze into more assorted kinds of national, international, private and public buncombe than has any other writer of his period. Therefore, hail, Shaw, hail and — I hope I shall wait long before saying it — farewell!

## MARINKA. JULY 18, 1945

*A "romantic musical," book by George Marion, Jr., and Karl Farkas, music and lyrics by Emerich Kalman and Mr. Marion respectively. Produced by Jules J. Leventhal and Harry Howard for 165 performances in, initially, the Winter Garden.*

## PROGRAM

NADINE	Ruth Webb	MADAME SACHER	Ethel Levey
COUNTESS VON DIEFENDORFER	Elaine Walther	COUNTESS LANDOVSKA	Luba Malina
BRATFISCH	Romo Vincent	WAITER	Jack Leslie
CROWN PRINCE RUDOLPH	Harry Stockwell	LIEUTENANT BALTATZY	Bob Douglas
COUNT LOBKOWITZ	Taylor Holmes	EMPEROR FRANZ JOSEF	Reinhold Schunzel
NAVAL LIEUTENANT	Noel Gordon	COUNTESS HUEBNER	Adrienne Gray
COUNT HOYOS	Paul Campbell	SERGEANT NEGULEGUL	Michael Barrett
FRANCIS	Leonard Elliott	LIEUTENANT PALAFY	Jack Gansert
TILLY	Ronnie Cunningham		
MARINKA	Joan Roberts		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *An open air movie theatre in Connecticut. Time. A June evening. The present.* Scene 2. *Gardens of the Imperial Palace of Schönbrunn. Time. A summer night in 1888.* Scene 3. *Bratfisch's cab.* Scene 4. *Living-room of the lodge at Mayerling.* Scene 5. *A street in Vienna.* Scene 6. *Red room of the Sacher Restaurant.* Scene 7. *The Gardens at Schönbrunn.* Act II. Scene 1. *The Austro-Hungarian border, 1888.* Scene 2. *Budapest. A corner of the parade ground.* Scene 3. *Same as Scene 1, Act II.* Scene 4. *Mayerling. Time. A January evening, 1889.* Scene 5. *Same as Scene 1, Act I.*

Director: Hassard Short.

THE EMPRISE marks the latest treatment of the celebrated Austrian Hall-Mills case known to history as the Mayerling tragedy. Books, plays and motion pictures on the affair have come along at regular intervals for years, and each has purveyed its own different solution of the mystery.

These solutions of the unexplained deaths of Crown Prince Rudolph and his mistress, the young Baroness Vetsera, have, it seems, included pretty nearly everything but a

joint coronary thrombosis. They have offered mutual suicide in the face of future thwart, murder inspired by the Emperor, the shooting of Vetsera by Rudolph and the subsequent turning of the gun upon himself, and even, reading between the ambiguous lines, the suspicion that both were probably mistaken by a bibacious huntsman for a pair of deer and their bodies toted into the forest lodge by way of absolving him of police inquiry.

My good friend of long standing, Lawrence Townsend, who was the United States minister to the Austrian court at the time of the tragedy and who danced with the Crown Princess on its very afternoon, has another and more likely explanation. It is his opinion based upon information which seeped through official channels directly after the discovery of the defunct couple that the case was one of murder and that the guilty party, for obvious reasons designedly unapprehended, was a forester whose young daughter Rudolph, a fellow notoriously miscellaneous in amatory matters, had violated and whose revenge was centered not only upon the Crown Prince but, for good measure, upon the woman who had supplanted her in his loose embraces.

The Messrs. Marion and Farkas, contrivers of the book of the musical, have, however, still another idea and, say what you will against it, you must admit that it is at least original, like eating Wiener rostbraten standing on your head. It is their notion that the couple did not die at all but, with the connivance of the placable Emperor, escaped to America and settled down on a farm in Connecticut, where they lived happily to a ripe old age, doubtless as neighbors of Gilbert Miller, Henry Luce and Franklin P. Adams.

The authors' rationale, while undeniably as inventive as Ed Wynn's typewriter with an adjustment for the comfortable eating of corn on the cob, nevertheless somehow offers its problems to the impolitely curious. They go so far as to allow, true enough, that a plotter against the Emperor, one Baltatzy, was shot by someone or other in Rudolph's stead. But since the bodies of both Rudolph and Vetsera were duly and confoundingly identified beyond any remotest doubt, since Baltatzy bore no more resemblance

to Rudolph than Madame Sacher, and since they seem to dismiss the certifiedly dead Vetsera's demise entirely, the only conclusion left to the skeptics is that, if Rudolph and Vetsera did escape, the bodies discovered in the hunting lodge must have been those of Artemus Ward and Josie Mansfield.

Another embarrassing thing about *Marinka* is that, while it is announced to be a "romantic musical," its manner of presentation is approximately as romantic as *Three Men On A Horse*. The Crown Prince in the person of Harry Stockwell, previously and more appropriately the cowboy Curley in *Oklahoma!*, remains still an Oklahoma cowboy in a fancy Brooks Costume Co. uniform given to such courtly diction as "merry" for "marry" and "chawclet" for "chocolate." And the Baroness Vetsera in the person of Joan Roberts, previously and also more appropriately the farm girl in the same show, brings to the imperial palace of Schönbrunn a general comportment which suggests that she has lost her way and has confused it with a Howard Johnson hot dog stand.

Hassard Short, who is usually expert in the staging of musicals, seems on this occasion to have been able to contribute nothing more to the romantic purpose of the evening than to bathe the stage periodically in a hideous pink light, which gives the actors and dancers the appearance of being the victims of a severe facial and body eczema. In addition, very evidently baffled by the old-fashionedness of the whole enterprise, he has even resorted to the 1890 business of having his forlorn lover occupy an empty stage at the end of the first act and, as the curtain slowly falls, move still more slowly with faltering steps in the direction in which his lady love has made her exit. About the only item missing from the *memento mori* is the lady love's dropped bouquet.

Everything else is present. The fat comedian bears the name Bratfisch. The lovers dance the usual waltz together and the song is "If I Never Waltz Again." The previous spit-fire mistress of the lover eventually discloses herself to be of a generous and forgiving nature and a decent sort withal. The song called "Treat A Woman Like A Drum" (beat her

to get the best results) is dutifully forthcoming, and so is the one in which the saucy brunette adventuress criticizes, with many a rolling eye, the amatory deficiencies of the male sex. The chorus dances a czardas; everybody in the revels scene becomes gaily inebriated without any visible alcoholic aid; the inevitable dachshund is brought on at one point for humorous effect; and the elderly Count Lobkowitz, adviser to the young Crown Prince, dispenses the customary worldly wise and cynical *mots* on women and love.

The authors' intermittent attempts to inspirit the doings with a little comedy only add to the length of the obituary notice. In view of the staleness of such of their efforts as causing a potential candidate for the Crown Prince's couch to allude to Walter Scott's novel as *Divanhoe* and as having the Crown Prince, upon noting a woman's décolleté, remark that he hopes to see more of her, they might more exactly have called their show *Marronka*, which, though a pretty sour pun, would for that very reason have been all the more critically suited to it.

Kalman, whose music for *Sari* and several other past exhibits has been a source of so much pleasure, here fails himself badly, not only deriving his melodies poorly from his former own but mimicking even more weakly familiar ones from other long-ago hands.

There are people, and their number is plentiful, who are so given to a wish for laughter that they respond to almost anything in the comedy line. The sight of a *soi-disant* comedian in red and blue striped underdrawers is enough to set them howling, and if the fellow then turns 'round rapidly three times and observes that his dog mistook him for a barber pole, and conducted himself accordingly, they are reduced to stitches. These words are not addressed to them. They are addressed rather to those others, and their number is hardly less plentiful, who also relish a good, loud laugh but whose cachinnatory muscles are not quite so promiscuous. It is these who, surveying the present stage, including this *Marinka*, realize to their unwelcome grief that never in the history of the modern American theatre has there been so great a dearth of authentic musical show funny-

men, men gifted naturally with the comic spirit and not merely pretenders to the throne whereon in the past have sat so many comedians of the blood-royal. The stage today has on it all kinds of newcomers billed as comedians, and one or two of them are fairly amusing in a synthetic way. But for the overwhelming part they compare ignobly with those who have gone before them and amount in the aggregate to rather dreary specimens.

It isn't that all the comedians of other days were clowns of a rare and fruity flavor. Far from it. Though esteemed highly in some quarters, such as De Wolf Hopper, Fred Stone, Francis Wilson and even Jimmy Powers never seemed to be especially endowed with the true comic attributes. Nor for that matter did such as Frank Moulan, Will Danforth, Ralph Herz, Jerome Sykes, Fred Frear, Frank Lalor, or Jess Dandy. But there were many more who were to the comic manner born and they brought real riches to the stage. In more remote years they numbered, among others, such as Dan Daly, Pete Dailey, Digby Bell, Joe Weber, Lew Fields, Raymond Hitchcock, Harry Bulger, Sam Bernard, Thomas Q. Seabrooke, Frank Daniels, the Rogers brothers, and George Munroe. And Joe Herbert, the Russell brothers, Joe Cawthorn, Dave Warfield, Otis Harlan, Harry Watson, Jr., Richard Carle, Harry Kelly, Nat Wills, Jeff De Angelis, and Walter Jones. And not forgetting Joe Coyne, Charlie Bigelow, John T. Kelly, Snitz Edwards, George Bickel, Harry Fisher, Alexander Carr, and lots and lots of others.

Nostalgia, mother of self-deception, is working its wicked will? Avaunt, ye cheesecakes! Come down to the very yesterday, to only a few short years ago, and reflect on a stage galvanized by comedians like Eddie Cantor, Al Jolson, W. C. Fields, Ed Wynn, Joe Frisco, Ray Bolger (who was to show up late in the season), George Jessel, Jimmy Durante, Jack Haley, Tom Howard, and the appetizing like. And reflect then on the new comics who are currently disporting themselves in their places.

With the exception of the perennial Bobby Clark, whom age can not wither nor custom stale and who is still without

a rival, along with Victor Moore and Bert Lahr, who, when afforded good material, which their recent vehicles have signally failed to provide them, are competent enough, there was not on the music show stage at this 1945 moment one single buffoon in the former grand tradition. Melville Cooper, who jumps from musical shows to straight plays, though at times a valid merchant of humor, is hardly to be listed in the catalogue, since his forte is legitimate comedy and since the music show often finds him awkward and uncomfortable. And Sig Arno, a newcomer from the German stage, though indicating symptoms of comic ability, remains still a critical gamble. Aside from these, the picture was a desolate one, so desolate indeed that when occasionally even some such relatively minor cutup as Rags Ragland or Red Marshall was drafted from the burlesque chambers he seemed by comparison something of a gift from above.

Consider the challengers.

Olsen and Johnson, for all the success of the several shows in which they have appeared, are not comedians in the critical definition but performers who rely almost wholly upon routine and extrinsic stage properties to cadge laughs. Without in either case a trace of the natural inner comic spirit, they are descendants of the old-time vaudeville performers of the Withers' Opry House species who substituted for that spirit a wholesale stepping into paste buckets, plunging of heads into flour barrels, and falling off stepladders and down flights of stairs. Their verbal delivery has need of pistol shots to give it lift; their absent humor has desperate recourse to outlandish apparel; and their physical antics are confined to such ancient hokums as mimicking the gait of an effeminate, implanting boots in another's posterior, and throwing bouquets at the audience and — shades of Nervo and Knox! — snapping them back with elastic strings.

Zero Mostel, who is peculiarly favored in some quarters, hasn't even the elastic string to assist his eminence. A graduate of the night clubs like various other current rank pretenders to the comedian crown, he is notable chiefly for accompanying his comic efforts with so abundant a flow of



sweat that his audiences are to be forgiven for mistaking themselves at a Billy Rose Aquacade and for anticipating an imminent high dive into it by Johnny Weissmuller. Mr. Mostel's *coup*, which he repeats with the persistence of an incurable case of hiccups, is, as hereinbefore noted, an imitation of a Senator confusedly haranguing his constituents and is not only so overly extended that what minimum of humor it possesses dies the death one-third of the way through it but makes one sigh wistfully for all the old roughly similar and immensely funnier acts like Walter Kelly's Virginia Judge.

Billy Gilbert, Billy House, Romo Vincent in this *Marinka*, Ralph Dumke, and Jackie Gleason are members of the fat-man school of comedy but, aside from their avoir-dupois, are in the kindergarten class. None of them is intrinsically of any perceptible humor. Only the absence of a diet is responsible for their stage acceptance. Reduce their waistlines and buttocks and what you would have left would be simply a packet of indifferent musical show actors relying hopefully upon their gag writers to make audiences laugh independently of themselves.

Danny Kaye, at the moment devoting himself to the moving pictures but cataloguable as one of the stage's contemporary jackpuddings, is venerated by some as a fellow of considerable juice. It seems to others, however, that his competences are strictly limited and that, aside from a purveying of the old business of shrinking coyness with a homosexual inflection and from the trick of being able to rattle off neo-Gilbert lyrics consisting of long strings of proper names or complex words, he has very little to offer. There is nothing essentially funny in his personality or delivery. He is rather merely an engaging young man with a great shock of red hair who may be listed critically as a better than ordinary parlor entertainer.

Milton Berle is simply a wisecracker who puts over his material, which is almost entirely of the radio humor species, with an impudent strut periodically interrupted by falsetto antics. He, like some of the others, employs the night club master of ceremonies technique, and seems less

suitied to the musical show stage than to a cabaret floor. And what is true of him is also to a sizable degree true of Jay C. Flippen, Jerry Lester, and Eddie Mayehoff.

Berle, whose appearance suggests anything but a comedian — he looks much more like a male Powers model or a stock company leading man in such plays as *Strongheart* and *For Dear Old Yale* — presents himself largely in the light of an obedient funnel for quips, new and more often old, either borrowed by him from other comiques or contrived on his behalf by professional Broadway joke haberdashers. Flippen is a vaudeville remainder whose humorous technique goes back to the days of trained seals, German acrobats, and colloquies with the orchestra leader. And Mayehoff is a Zero Mostel minus the perspiration.

These men peddle the humor of others rather than any humor in their own persons. In them there is no symptom of the genuine comedy internal in such comedians as Clark, Fields, Cantor, and the like. Not one of them could brew laughter from, say, the Prof. Labermacher skit of George Jessel as Jessel does, or from the idiotic inventions of Ed Wynn as Wynn does, or from the French lesson sketch of Willie Howard as even Howard, an inferior comedian, does. There isn't in them, in truth, the comic resources of such lesser comedians of the immediate past as Hugh Cameron, Lew Hearn, and Phil Silvers.

The Berle method — I nominate him as an example since the method is common to a number of the present wags who vacillate between the radio and the stage — is a combination of giving insult, after the Frankie Hyers-Pat Harrington pattern, and of suffering it, after the Victor Moore pattern. Thus, in the first case, something like this:

Berle: Why do you wear such big bow ties?

Vis-à-vis: You think they're a trifle large?

Berle: Large? Say, you don't have to go around looking like the nose of a B-29!

Thus, in the second:

Berle: Just look at me — I'm the flame of youth.

Vis-à-vis: Yeah, well you better put a log on the fire!

Or:

Berle: Miss, if I could only go out with you I would be putty in your hands. Would you?

Vis-à-vis: Sure, when I have some windows to fix!

Henny Youngman, who shows up on the stage intermittently, has a somewhat more natural comedy gift but often invalidates it by allowing his night club master of ceremonies manner to intrude upon it and by forcing his humor upon an audience. He has an air of challenging his auditors, and the only comedian who has been able successfully to get away with that in some years has been Al Jolson. Eddie Foy, Jr., is still in the incubator stage. And Joey Faye, for all his burlesque training, is fairly lugubrious.

There remains, finally, the still persistent Jimmy Savo. The label under which Savo operates is "pantomimic comedian," but it is to be allowed that the pantomimic part of the definition is rather more accurate than the comedian. As a pantomimist he is tolerable, though endless repetition of the same acts has taken its toll of their effect. As a comedian, however, he leaves everything to be desired. Beyond the few humors implicit in his dumb show, he brings to comedy technique very little — an unvaried and monotonous wide-eyed wonder, a periodic little vocal squeak, an immutable expression of puzzlement; and on the rare occasions when he has been called upon to speak he has betrayed his total lack of comic delivery. Even in pantomime, some of which was originally not without its essential humorous possibilities, he has been guilty of such overly slow timing that the possibilities have not been fully realized. While fair in the dumb show direction, he discloses himself as fundamentally a not particularly funny man and hence unable to embroider his pantomime, as really able pantomimic comedians have embroidered theirs, with the brightly colored strands of hilarity.

## MR. STRAUSS GOES TO BOSTON

SEPTEMBER 6, 1945

*A "romantic comedy with music," book by Leonard L. Levinson based on a story by Alfred Grünwald and Geza Herczeg, lyrics by Robert Sour, and music by Johann Strauss, Jr., and Robert Stolz. Produced by Felix Bretano for 12 performances in the Century Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

DAPPER DAN PEPPER	MRS. DEXTER	<i>Latyle Tenen</i>
Ralph Dumke	MRS. BLAKELY	<i>Rose Perfect</i>
POLICEMAN MCGILLICUDY	MRS. WHITNEY	<i>Sydney Grant</i>
Brian O'Mara	MRS. TAYLOR	<i>Arlene Dahl</i>
INSPECTOR GOGARTY	MRS. HASTINGS	<i>Selma Felton</i>
Don Fiser	MRS. IVERSON	<i>Mario Barova</i>
1ST REPORTER	MRS. BYRD	<i>Cecile Sherman</i>
Dennis Dengate	BUTLER	<i>John Oliver</i>
2D REPORTER	TOM AVERY	<i>Jay Martin</i>
Larry Gilbert	A PHOTOGRAPHER	<i>John Harrold</i>
3D REPORTER	HETTY STRAUSS	<i>Ruth Matteson</i>
Joseph Monte	PRESIDENT GRANT	<i>Norman Roland</i>
PEPI	SOLO DANCERS {	<i>Harold Lang</i>
Florence Sundstrom		<i>Babs Heath</i>
BELLHOP		<i>Margit Dekova</i>
Frank Finn		
JOHANN STRAUSS		
George Rigaud		
ELMO TILT		
Edward J. Lambert		
HOTEL MANAGER		
Lee Edwards		
BROOK WHITNEY		
Virginia MacWatters		
A WAITER		
Paul Mario		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *The lobby of the Grand Palace Hotel, New York City, June 16, 1872.* Scene 2. *Corridor in the hotel. Immediately after.* Scene 3. *Sitting-room of Strauss' suite. A few minutes later.* Scene 4. *Off to Boston.* Scene 5. *Drawing room of the Whitney home in Boston. Two weeks later.* Scene 6. *Reception in honor of Johann Strauss.* Act II. Scene 1. *Bedroom of Johann Strauss at the Governor Winthrop House. A few hours later.* Scene 2. *The balcony of the Governor Winthrop House. The next morning.* Scene 3. *Along the Charles River. Evening of the Fourth of July.*

Director: Felix Brentano.

THE HUSSARS, gypsies and brigands of the musical stage of yesterday seem to have been supplanted by the composers. Schubert in *Blossom Time*, Grieg in *Song Of Norway*, the

Strausses, *père et fils*, in *The Great Waltz* — these and more in late years have entranced audiences which in other days reserved their raptures for the Helberts and their black plumes, the Sandor Barinkays of the open road, and the Fra Diavolos disguised as the Marquis of San Carlo. The hussars, gypsies and brigands, had they hoped to survive, should have written their own music or, in such cases as composers like Millöcker, Auber, Balfe and Strauss wrote it for them, should have seen to it that the radio was invented years earlier.

The radio has latterly acquainted thousands of people who do not know the difference between B-flat and B-Lillie with the superficial tunes of the famous tone artists at the expense of their basic art and has brought into the theatre a copious stream of new customers. These fascinate themselves with the notion that their musical education is enriched by spectacles in which one struggling composer or another is pictured as a sentimental half-wit who could not have written even "I Wonder Who's Kissing Her Now" and whose songs, occasionally adapted out of all recognition by Broadway tune couturiers, are put into his and adjacent stage mouths much like clinical thermometers made of peppermint candy. It is thus that any straight play which treats truthfully of a celebrated composer is, irrespective of its quality, seemingly doomed to failure, as witness some such late effort in a Wagnerian direction as the Theatre Guild's *Prelude To Exile*.

The technique of the persons who put on musical exhibits dealing with composers and their works is hence already pretty well established, and that it will vary little in most of the exhibits yet to come is highly probable. It is accordingly hopeless to expect, for example, that someone will think up something a little fresher than having the protagonist romantically torn between two loves, whether both female or whether one female and the other his art, for though such dramatic cliché may be suitable to the picture screen it remains hardly persuasive and acceptable to the more intelligent theatre public, which appreciates that, with the possible exceptions of Schubert and Schumann,

the love lives of the illustrious gentlemen, along with the women involved in them, have been as appealingly romantic as a severe case of Parkinson's disease.

A prayer may further be lifted that in the future the shows will not, as in the case of the one under scrutiny, be cast with a male performer so pretty that an audience is puzzled as to whether the central figure was after all a composer or a movie actor. And, while the praying is going on, may something also be done about the coloratura heroines. I do not know how others may feel about it, but when it comes to me I confess to have a very difficult time of it believing in any man's passionate adoration of and tender solicitude for a woman who occupies the entire evening — and very probably, God forbid, the rest of the night — loudly gargling her way, while grinning like a triumphant hyena, to a high C.

This particular show, based on the Waltz King's visit to the World Peace Jubilee in Boston in 1872, is addedly compounded of materials so stale that it is indistinguishable from the turn of the century exhibits which balanced the similar already worn triangle on the stage with three in the orchestra, all pounded like hamburgers throughout the evening, and which purveyed in their romantic heroine roles the before-mentioned coloratura soprano's who while in ferocious operation tripled business at the bar in the neighboring Browne's Chop House.

There have been some trying shows in our theatre over the span of the years, but there have been few more grievous in every respect than this one. Aside from its several interpolated Strauss compositions, it makes even such exhibits as *Rhapsody* and *The Firebrand Of Florence* seem right out of the wine cellar. It contains everything out of the moth-bag from the tall fat comedian and the diminutive one who loses himself under the former's ample belly to the afore-said coloratura screecher; from the aforesaid triangle plot involving the composer, his wife and his inamorata to the inevitable haughty society ladies expressing their shock over their tea-cups; and from the venerable waltz ballet and chorus *marche militaire* to the act-closing scene of the

parted lovers. It includes as well everything from the joke, "This is my coming-out dress" — "It must be; you're certainly coming out of it," to that other valetudinarian, "I'm homesick" — "I wish she were home, sick," not to mention fifteen or more other such bijoux. Nor absent are the dance numbers in which the girls, twirling their parasols like carriage wheels, are driven off with pink ribbon reins, and the old *Belle Of New York* type of "Down With Sin" lyric, and the presumptive comedy associated with ladies' old-fashioned dress bustles. The only things missing are Emperor Franz Josef, and Mitzi, the lady's maid, at the masked ball.

The basic notion of the show has all kinds of sardonic possibilities, as may be readily appreciated from the obscene picture of Strauss being invited to preside over a musical nightmare, the invention of an Irishman named Pat Gilmore, which embraced 20,000 choral singers dressed in Turkish costumes, an orchestra which contained eighty-four trombones, eighty-three cornets, eighty-three tubas, seventy-five drums decorated with the flags of all nations (including a bass drum twelve feet high), a specially constructed Jubilee Piano so big that two hundred and fifty people could sit on it, and did, the largest and most thunderous organ yet seen or heard in the world, three hundred and thirty strings, one hundred and nineteen woodwinds, and one hundred and fifty members of the Boston Fire Department belaboring one hundred and fifty anvils for the *Trovatore* "Anvil Chorus," to say nothing, if the New York *Herald Tribune* has recorded history faithfully, of "a battery of field artillery wired to assist in the percussion effects, the military band of the Garde Republicaine of Paris, and the band of the Kaiser Franz Grenadier Regiment of Germany." But all that Mr. Levinson does in the face of the satirical possibilities is to have Strauss, with the aid of an off-stage violinist, solemnly saw a sentimental tune to his lady love on a small fiddle.

The acting company, the costumes, the stage direction, the additional music by Stolz, the lyrics, and all else were similarly genus *Meleagris*.

Mr. Brentano, the producer of the show, though he has

had some previous local experience with revivals of old established operettas, has evidently not been in this country long enough from his native Austria to appreciate that the newer musical shows, all things considered, provide one of the theatre's greatest financial risks. Viewing the enormous success of such shows as *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel*, *Up In Central Park*, *Song Of Norway*, *Bloomer Girl*, et al., he has persuaded himself that musical shows are what the American public especially wants and, as a corollary, that making a lot of money out of them is as easy as rolling off a log. The due consequence has been that he and his backers in rolling off the log have burst their trousers wide open and have spilled the last dimes out of the pockets. For one show that makes money, at least three lose it and two others are very lucky to break even. The public may want musical shows but it is waywardly choosy about the kind it wants. The idea that it will take a musical show simply because it is a musical show is on a par with the idea that it will drink anything, including dishwater or wood alcohol, simply because it is thirsty.

When producers like Mr. Brentano think of last season and the earlier part of this, they think of the successes. But they forget to think of the large freight of failures like *Dream With Music*, *Sadie Thompson*, *Rhapsody*, *The Seven Lively Arts*, *Sing Out, Sweet Land!*, *A Lady Says Yes*, *The Firebrand Of Florence*, *Memphis Bound*, and *Hollywood Pinafore*. The loss on these and others totaled more than a million dollars. When in turn they think of the season before, they think of such big successes as *One Touch Of Venus* and *Carmen Jones*. But they somehow overlook the large number of failures like *The Vagabond King*, *Run, Little Chillun*, *My Dear Public*, *Bright Lights of 1944*, *Hairpin Harmony*, *Artists And Models*, *What's Up, A Connecticut Yankee*, *Jackpot*, *Allah Be Praised!* and *Helen Goes to Troy*. The loss on these totaled another fortune. And when they think of the season before that, they lick their chops over hits like the phenomenal *Oklahoma!*, *Let's Face It*, *Star And Garter*, *Rosalinda*, and *Something For The Boys*. But they elect to close their eyes over such duds as *Let Freedom Sing*, *Count Me In*, *Beat The Band*, *The*



*Time, The Place, And The Girl, New Faces of 1943, You'll See Stars, and For Your Pleasure*, which lost their combined socks. And in no case or in no season do they think of the shows that, closing abruptly after out-of-New York tryouts, lose not only their socks but their garters. They thus dream of the *Oklahomas!* and *Carousels* and *Up In Central Parks*, but they forget entirely such still-born babies as *The Little Dog Laughed*, *Glad To See You*, and *Champagne For Everybody*, which breathed their first and last in, respectively, Atlantic City, Boston, and Philadelphia. Or *Spring In Brazil*, which expired in Chicago to a loss of 300,000 precious dollars. Or the foundered *Shootin' Star*.

A sufficient portion of such gentlemen are relatively new to the producing business. Though such newcomers have occasionally been lucky — Edwin Lester with *Song Of Norway* and the producers of *On The Town* are recent examples — they more often have not been. It isn't that the producers of experience have on the other hand always been wonderboys, as a glance at their records plainly attests. But if the road is sometimes rocky for them, as Max Gordon and others have lately found, the figures indicate that it is generally much rockier for most of the comparative novices.

The notion that nothing is sure in the case of drama, so vociferously maintained by producers, is open to question. But it is different with musical shows, or at least with most musical shows. And it has been different for as long as any statistical bore can remember. When Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Gondoliers* was produced by Nixon and Zimmerman in the far yesterday, though everyone associated with the enterprise would have bet 1,000 to one on its success it wasn't long before the producers had to refer to it as *The Gone Dollars*. Victor Herbert, who made fortunes for some producers lost them for others, though his scores for the failures were as proficient as those of some of his hits. It was often thus in other days. And it has been thus at times in days more recent. Billy Rose's grand show, *Jumbo*, which looked like a deserved sensation, lost a pot of money. Sigmund Romberg, usually a pretty sure box-office bet, managed only thirty-two performances to a heavy loss with his

*Forbidden Melody*. With Negro shows doing good business in other quarters, *Black Rhythm* ran for only six performances. Lehár's music couldn't save *Frederika*, and for all his delightful score in *The Land Of Smiles* the show had to shut down for lack of customers. Richard Rodgers, riding on the top of the wave, revived his *A Connecticut Yankee* to his sorrow.

Things are not always what they seem on the surface. Two shows in recent seasons which achieved more than a whole year's run on Broadway didn't in that considerable period return their production costs to the investors. Despite big business in various cities during their tryouts, several shows have lost a lot of extra money on running expenses. And a show that not long ago enjoyed a long and apparently very successful Broadway run paid its nervous backers a profit of only two per cent on their money, after tying it up without interest for more than a year and a half.

If so many as one-third of the shows in the average season prove to be good investments, one is much surprised. If so many as one out of three breaks even, one is equally surprised. And if so few as four or five don't lose at the very least 150,000 dollars apiece, you can knock one over with a feather. If the usually sure-fire George Kaufman can drop that much with a *Hollywood Pinafore*, it is child's-play for others. Like Mr. Brentano, for example, who dropped that amount and 30,000 dollars more.

## A BOY WHO LIVED TWICE

SEPTEMBER 11, 1945

*A play by Leslie Floyd Egbert and Gertrude Ogden Tubby.  
Produced by Hall Shelton for 15 performances in the Biltmore Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

ELLEN BLAKE	Cecil Elliott	DR. CECIL BLAKE (DOCKASY)
BRAXTON	Stapleton Kent	W. O. McWatters
JEANE HASTINGS	Anne Sargent	PHILIP HASTINGS John Heath
RANDALL HASTINGS		ANNE CUNNINGHAM Strelsa Leeds
	Grandon Rhodes	DR. BOULETTE Vaughan Glaser
MARTHA HASTINGS		MOTHER Nellie Burt
	Claire Windsor	

**SYNOPSIS:** *The scene is the living-room of the Hastings home — Long Island, N. Y. Act I. Scene 1. Late afternoon in August. Scene 2. The same evening. Act II. Scene 1. Late afternoon the next day. Scene 2. After dinner — four days later. Act III. One hour later.*

Director: Paul Foley.

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**T**HE AUTHORS, bleary-eyed and dusty but flushed with excitement, have come up from a stack of psychiatric case histories with what they regard as something daringly new to modern drama, to wit, the theme of exchanged personalities. Is it, they demand, reincarnation that affects their protagonist, or is it thought-transference, or is it transmigration of the soul? I take the liberty of relieving their doubt. Judging from their exhibit, it is reincarnation in reverse out of such claptrap as *The Road To Yesterday* of forty-odd years ago and *The Ladder* of twenty. It is thought-transference out of such pseudo-cerebral melodrama as Augustus Thomas' *The Witching Hour* of thirty-nine years ago. And it is transmigration of the soul out of such farce-comedy as Wilhelm von Scholz's *Borrowed Souls* (adapted as *Double Exposure*) of forty years ago and out of such more serious drama as Anski's familiar *The Dybbuk* of thirty. What also and much more definitely afflicts their

protagonist is some of the most confused and amateurish playwriting on record.

What the play really amounts to is simply a rewriting of some such plot as figured in previous disasters like *The Visitor* and *Oh, Brother!* and given a veneer of psychiatry to lend it a semblance of weight. The resulting weight, however, is less that of psychiatry than of lead. So overly heavy and portentous is the handling of the materials that the evening frequently skirts the borders of travesty. It is thus that when one of the medicos wields a stethoscope in diagnosis of the protagonist's case and is made to go about the business like an actor simultaneously playing Ibsen and Strindberg that one is reminded of the *Dr. Kronkite* vaudeville sketch in which Smith performs a similar examination of Dale, stops suddenly agape, scratches his head and exclaims, "I don't know; either the stethoscope is busted or you're dead!"

So far as the badly tangled playwriting can be unravelled, the plot seems to be about the disembodied spirit of a defunct Army flier which houses itself in the body of a Long Island playboy who falls off a horse and is thought to have been killed, but who is brought back to life by his incantatory sister. The boy ridden by the other's psyche is at a loss in what are to him alien surroundings and, when the going gets to the point where he is about to commit incest with his sister, meditates suicide as the only solution. In this he is restrained by the sister who warns him that it would mean murder of the boy whose spirit has occupied his corpus, which, since the latter is already dead, may be allowed hardly to make much sense. In the end it develops that the two boys were identical twins, one having been exchanged for another baby at birth by W. S. Gilbert here operating under the program name of Randall Hastings, which makes even less sense. All this is recounted in terms suggesting a mixture of J. B. Priestley's *I Have Been Here Before*, such returned-from-the-dead articles as *The Wind Is Ninety*, and the kind of plays now and then written by stage-struck doctors.

The direction was in terms of undertaking, and the act-

ing, save in the instances of Anne Sargent and Nellie Burt, was mainly of the species which steadily affects frowns to indicate profound thought and overly extended pauses to suggest grave perplexity. It further induced amused speculation as to why it is that an elderly ham actor with a ham bass voice is so regularly relied upon by producers to lend what they believe is verisimilitude to the role of a distinguished doctor, psychiatrist, or scientist.

## DEVILS GALORE. SEPTEMBER 12, 1945

*A comedy by Eugene Vale. Produced by William Cahn for 5 performances in the Royale Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

EFFIE THURSTON	Tony Eden	LARRY	Paul Byron
BERNIE GRANT	Michael King	BOBBIE	John (Red) Kullers
CECIL BROCK	George Baxter	INSPECTOR BRANDON	
MISS PIERCE	Betty Kelley		Malcolm Lee Beggs
MRS. ISABEL GOODWYN	Jean Cleveland	ATAMAR	Rex O'Malley
DR. AGUIRRA	Harry Sothern	PACKY "THE FLASH" GURNEY	Solen Burry
A DEVIL	Ernest Cossart		

**SYNOPSIS:** Act I. Scene 1. *It is evening.* Scene 2. *The following morning.* Act II. Scene 1. *Eleven days have passed.* Scene 2. *The following evening.* Act III. Scene 1. *The next morning.* Scene 2. *Evening of the same day. The time is the present. Cecil Brock's office on the 34th floor of a Fifth Avenue skyscraper.*

Director: Robert Perry.

**T**HIS AUTHOR, a Hollywood scenario writer, apparently also imagines that he has hit upon something very saucy and original in the idea of the Devil coming to earth and finding its current morals shocking to him. Back in the far reaches of youth, the stage in one or another direction periodically offered an exhibit called *Faust Up-To-Date* which merchanted exactly the same notion. Faust in the person of the usual chubby actor in a curly yellow wig and a Marguerite (or Gretchen) in a yellower one and who was generally his wife off-stage were discovered sitting in a café named *Le Chat Noir*. Mephistopheles, made up to look like Herrmann the Great (or vice versa) popped out of a red-lighted trapdoor with an ear-splitting "Avaunt, ye mortals!" but notwithstanding congenially sat himself down at the table with them. Believing to tempt the innocent Marguerite, who looked like Texas Guinan, with wine and whispers and to double-tempt the guileless Faust, who closely

resembled Baby Face Nelson, with even more wine and louder whispers, Meph was presently tumbled out of his chair when both turned on him for a fool, apprised him that they had been keeping company, so to speak, for years, instructed him that the world had grown up considerably since he had left it, and caused him with a yelp of disquiet to deject himself again through the trap-door to the more circumspect nether regions.

Since that distant era there have been innumerable other paraphrases of the idea, most of them steadfastly witless. The only one that I recall with the slightest relative bounce was the act contributed in 1911 to the old Folies Bergère, now the Fulton Theatre, by Rennold Wolf and Channing Pollock, in which the Devil booted various New Yorkers out of Hell as being altogether too sinful for it. And the mild bounce of that rested largely in causing the Devil to perform Will Rogers lariat tricks with his tail.

At this point the customary bore will arise, not without some justification, and proclaim that it makes no difference how old a basic idea may be and that everything depends upon a playwright's treatment of it. The bore may again sit down. Vale has treated it to such an embroidery of sexual activity, murder mystery, bad puns, and other cinema appurtenances, including a ten-cent trick ending, that it loses even what minor interest it may have had in the remote yesterdays.

These Hollywood writers who attempt to lift themselves up to drama constitute an odd crew. Consider this particular specimen. His conception of a satirical modernization of *Faust* is to turn Faust into a concupiscent literary agent, Gretchen into an ambitious literary cutie from the rural regions, and Mephistopheles into an emissary of himself who falls in love with her. His conception of wit rests in such inversions as "there's hell to pay," "having a devil of a time," "the heaven with you!" and "he's a devil of a fellow." His conception of novel stage business rests in such devices as smoke-puffs emanating from the Devil's telephone, exploding cigarettes, and the sniffing of sulphur upon the Devil's approaches. And his conception of dra-

matic action begins and ends with suddenly blacked-out scenes and pistol shots in the dark.

The full measure of his play is to be taken in no more exact way than in the failure of Ernest Cossart, a competent actor, to make anything whatever of its Devil role. This is perhaps the first time in modern stage history that anyone has missed making an impression in such a role, which seems to be one of the most automatically sure-fire, as this same Cossart indicated some fourteen years ago in Benn Levy's *The Devil Passes* and as all kinds of other actors, good and bad, like Lew Morrison, George Arliss, Edwin Stevens, Henry Dixey, Augustin Duncan, *et al.*, have attested down the years from the extravaganza made of the Goethe drama to the devil plays of Rostand, Molnár, and others. When the critics fail to praise an actor in the role, as in this exceptional and record-breaking case, the author of it must be an exceptional and record-breaking incompetent.

Mr. Cossart thus haplessly becomes the first actor of the role who can not enjoy a laugh at the critics' expense, since the high tributes paid to certain actors by the latter are frequently the source of much confidential merriment to them, it being well known that little tickles an actor more than his private substantiation of the fact that the critics are in larger part asses. The common notion that actors disesteem only those critics who give them bad notices is a faulty one. They disesteem even more greatly and to the point of lewd guffaws those who in their ignorance of circumstances praise them to the skies.

It takes, for example, an actress so poor that she could not get a job as an understudy at the Provincetown Playhouse to fail completely in the role of Jennifer Dubedat in Shaw's *The Doctor's Dilemma*. Yet it is rare indeed that even such a one does not get such notices from many of the critics as are most often reserved for Euripides and Bobby Clark. The actress who gets them, if she is possessed of even the faintest sense of humor, must enjoy some exquisite chuckles. For she appreciates that, while the role may be not exactly actor-proof, it certainly is critic-proof, as the



records clearly indicate, and that the critics, being mostly sentimental creatures, simply can not resist its intrinsic appeal. There are any number of other roles, both classic and modern, which similarly affect them, and some are far from being sentimental, which constitutes the critics even bigger gulls. The worst that any actor in the role of Mercutio thus generally suffers are reviews allowing that he is not so good in it as some other actor who has played it. A downright bad notice for him is as uncommon as a downright bad notice for any actor, however atrocious, who appears in the role of a butler, an Irish policeman, a Chinaman, or Juliet's nurse. Mercutio wins the critics because he is the attorney for what they would wish to be their alter egos. Sentimental as most of them generically are, they like to pleasure themselves with the notion that they are not, and are really at bottom worldly and even very cynical fellows. And Mercutio is at once their apology, their sulfa drug, and their release from their suppressed desire.

Juliet's nurse is a further breath of barroom air in what might possibly be an overly fragrant and slightly cloying flower garden, and so is almost as relieving as Mercutio even to critics otherwise given to a moralistic teetotalism. As for butlers, Irish policemen and Chinamen, I have no explanation to offer. I simply fall back on the records of the last fifty years or more. I haven't time to look up all of the reviews, but I will be glad to award a grand prize in the form of a photograph of the Pulitzer play committee to anyone who, regardless of age, race or color, can dig up more than one or two out of what are probably thousands which are disparagements of the actors who have played the roles.

The contemporary theatre provides a number of appetizing examples of roles that for one reason or another have bamboozled the critics into believing their actors to be brothers and sisters to the sun god, or better. No one, I hope, will argue that Anthony Ross, for example, is not sufficiently impressive in his role of the so-called gentleman caller in *The Glass Menagerie*. But he could hardly help being so in view of the nature of the role, which has

been so deliberately calculated by the playwright in the matter of delayed and suspensive entrance, in the way of sudden boisterous contrast to the other characters and to the antecedent dramatic mood, etc., that only the entrance and presence in it of the whole Moscow Art Theatre company on ice skates would impress the critics slightly more. The actor who could not get away with the role, which begins, continues and ends in a single key, for the most part an agreeably genial one, would have to have one leg, a Ubangi mouth, green hair, and a Harvard accent. And I am not altogether sure of even such a one.

A second example is to be had in the case of the heroine's role in *The Voice Of The Turtle*, and a third in that of Major Joppolo in *A Bell For Adano*. None of the actresses who have played Sally Middleton in the van Druten comedy — Margaret Sullavan, Betty Field, Florence Rice, K. T. Stevens, Martha Scott, Louisa Horton — has been other than appealing in the role; none has failed, though each is different from the other; and none has seemed poor to any critic, though at least two have factually been far from what they should have been. Sally is irresistible to the sentimental critical heart. Any even fairly competent young actress under six feet tall and one hundred and fifty pounds who doesn't look too much like a scarecrow can't help getting pretty good notices in the part.

Joppolo is an almost equally critic-proof role. I can readily name at least five actors, all of them different, who could play it quite as acceptably, if not better, than Fredric March. I can just as readily name five who could not play it so well. But, if the critics had not seen March in it and if any one of the latter lot were to play it, he would, unless I am sadly mistaken, get all the praise that March has got. Joppolo is what the theatre of other days knew as a William Gillette role. A Gillette role was sure-fire with the critics of that era. And a Gillette role brought up to date is just as critic-proof now.

It is the mark of most critics that they think themselves fully wise to acting esoterica, but they are fooled and tricked quite as often as the customers of a ring-the-cane

or Japanese rolling ball game. If they studied the canes more closely and scrutinized the rolling ball slots with a cannier eye, they would not be so frequently swindled out of their critical dimes. But, anyway, it is fun for the actors and, since the public isn't even as discriminating as the critics and doesn't know the difference, everybody has a good time. Yet just the same, if I were an actor and were to get wonderful notices for a performance in any such open-and-shut critic-proof role as, say, Jeeter Lester in *Tobacco Road*, Sheridan Whiteside in *The Man Who Came To Dinner*, or Father Day in *Life With Father*, I don't think I'd rush out and buy me a scrapbook.

## MAKE YOURSELF AT HOME

SEPTEMBER 13, 1945

*A comedy by Vera Mathews. Produced by Albert N. Chapereau and Johnnie Walker for 4 performances in the Barrymore Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

LUTHER QUINN	MONA GILBERT	Bernadene Hayes
Donald McClelland	(MAMA) GILBERT	
HONEYBELLE COLLINS		Suzanne Jackson
Bonnie Nolan	IVY	Elizabeth Brew
VIC ARNOLD	FERRIS DELMAR	Robert Carleton
RAY GILBERT	BARNEY	Grey Stafford
PORTER	BOB	Robert Noe
Charles Carol	SAMMY	Loy Nilson
DWIGHT WARING	Wm. Valentine	

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *Living-room of Mona Gilbert's New York apartment. Early spring morning.* Scene 2. *Same. Following morning.* Act II. Scene 1. *Same. Five weeks later, early morning.* Scene 2. *Same. Few minutes later. Time. The present.*

Director: Johnnie Walker.

MISS MATHEWS' literary art up to this moment had been confined to the moving pictures. That it was soon and behoovingly to be reconfined became clear ten minutes after her attempt at dramaturgy had got under way. And that she would have traveling company back to Hollywood in the persons of the Messrs. Chapereau and Walker, both hitherto similarly engaged with the moving pictures, who served as its producers and in the instance of Mr. Walker also its stage director, became clear at the same time. Miss Sally Eilers, a further moving picture figure who inhabited the leading role in the teetotum during its Philadelphia tryout, anticipated the three by booking passage on a train back before the New York opening.

Miss Mathews' idea of a play consisted, among other things, in the additional extraordinary idea of a fading film actress who hoped to establish herself as an actress on

the Broadway stage, who was a prompt collapse on it, but who subsequently became sensational newspaper copy and an overnight enormous success when her young brother, a cinema idolator, beat up a critic who had given her a bad notice. Since the critic was identified as myself, it was of course plain that, for all Miss Mathews' otherwise superabundant thematic imagination, her acquaintance with the tenets of theatrical art must be nil, as it has been established that the dramatic business of doing me in (observe *The Seven Lively Arts, et al.*) augurs box-office failure for the parties to it, which only goes to show what gross injustice there is in the world.

Miss Mathews was equally remiss in other directions. She seemed to believe that if the characters in a play are facetious about its quality, the audience will somehow be influenced to consider the play in the light of an unjustly criticized under-dog and will think it much better than it is, indeed pretty fine. She also, in the same connection, seemed to believe that, in the case of her play within a play, if one character is made to ask, "Don't actors always celebrate after the first night?" and another to reply, "Not after this one!" the audience's laughter will be intended for the play within the play and not, derisively, for the play itself. It was apparently her further fancy that she might pass off as her own comedy lines like "When I eat I don't feel so hungry," pilfered from the earlier mentioned Smith and Dale *Dr. Kronkite* sketch with which her New York audience has been familiar for the last thirty years. She also appeared to think that there was a delicately risqué quality in such smut as a man's remark, upon stretching himself out on a couch preliminary to a business deal, "I like to do business lying down," and a woman's allowance, "That's a good way to do it." And her idea of wit was her portly broker's "I have a big seat in Wall Street," with the retort, "I'll say you havel" She likewise seemed to imagine that allusions to stomach ulcers were extremely funny.

The acting company was embarrassed out of any talent

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it may have possessed not only by the play's materials but by the manner in which Mr. Walker directed them. There have been worse theatrical evenings, but only in the sense that a pain in the gluteal prominence is worse than one in the neck.

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## THE RYAN GIRL. SEPTEMBER 24, 1945

*A melodrama by Edmund Goulding. Produced by the Messrs. Shubert in association with Albert De Courville for 48 performances in the Plymouth Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

WEAVY HICKS	Una O'Connor	2ND LT. VICTOR SELLERS
MILEY GAYLON	Edmund Lowe	Richard Gibbs
VENETIA RYAN	June Havoc	JANE CLARK
HAROLD TYLER	Curtis Cooksey	Doris Dalton
LT. GEORGE CLARK		EDWIN ROURKE
	John Compton	Calvin Thomas
	Radio broadcast by Lowell Thomas	

SYNOPSIS: Act I. *Early morning.* Act II. *Late afternoon.* Act III. *Early evening.*

Scene. *Venetia Ryan's apartment — New York City. Time. A Sunday — September, 1944.*

Director: *Edmund Goulding.*

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MR. GOULDING, for twenty years a Hollywood screen writer and director, has had as his proud purpose the composition of a melodrama, since he says he has figured that "for forty years of American stage history melodramas have enjoyed one-third the box-office lure" and, according to an interview in *Variety*, enviously cites such great *littérateurs* as Samuel Shipman, Willard Mack, Anthony Paul Kelly and Harry O. Hoyt as "sure-fire meller payer-offers of the past." So, he continues, "I've tried to blend the present day movie technique with the tried-and-true legit. I think what I've done is to blend old-fashioned melodrama with modern Hollywood overtones."

To give him his full due, Mr. Goulding has accomplished exactly what he set out to do, which is hardly, as may be suspected, fortunate from a critical point of view. Nor, it has happened, from a box-office, since his theatrical information and knowledge are on the weak side. Melodrama has not been the relative Golconda that he believes

it to have been. Of the seventy-five exhibits that have achieved the longest runs in the theatre of the last forty years only four have been melodramas, and at least two of the four are open to some question in the generally accepted definition. Furthermore, far from being "sure-fire meller payer-offers of the past," Shipman and Mack had as many failures as successes, indeed more; Kelly, who wrote little, certainly did not manage any financial whirlwind; and Harry O. Hoyt's name I can not find even a trace of in my comprehensive records.

That *The Ryan Girl* is old-fashioned melodrama, as Mr. Goulding gratuitously apprises us, is assuredly the truth. And that it is blended with modern Hollywood overtones, as he even more gratuitously tells us, no one who has ever sniffed a noseful of Hollywood overtones, whether modern or otherwise, will doubt for a moment. The play, in fact, is so old-fashioned, what with its to-do about a woman with a past, her child from whom she seeks to conceal it, etc., that its very bustle rattles. It is, further, so obviously embellished with Hollywood quirks and fancies that it would have surprised no one had Sam Goldwyn or Joe Pasternak suddenly appeared on the stage on the opening night, interrupted its action, and warmly congratulated the author as being something rather colossal. (They, or their equivalents, did so in due course and bought the epic at a fancy figure.)

Forty years ago, in the heyday of the Messrs. Kremer, Reid, Davis, and other such purveyors of peanut gallery melodrama, the contour of Mr. Goulding's plot was as follows:

Valerie Randolph, a quondam actress in *The Lady Of Lyons*, *East Lynne* and similar plays and now living in retirement with her husband, was once the mistress of a Wall Street banker by whom she had a child. The banker was apprehended for embezzlement and sent to Sing Sing. With the passing of time, Valerie married a reputable citizen and for a while all went smoothly with her life, since she had placed the baby, whose existence is unknown to her husband, in the keeping of an understanding old aunt.



As the years go on, the child grows up into young manhood and Valerie, whom he does not know to be his mother, longs in her heart, like Madame X, to clasp him to her maternal bosom. But, hiding her ache, she keeps silent. One day the door is suddenly thrown open and there on the threshold of her peaceful married household stands the banker, the shadow of her past, who has escaped from jail. He comes to blackmail Valerie, and her house of cards threatens to tumble about her. Follows the big confrontation scene at the conclusion of which Valerie shoots and kills the villain to save her son from knowing disgrace. After a trial scene, in which the defense counsel proves to be her son now turned lawyer, she is found guilty and sent to prison but is subsequently pardoned by the Governor of the State of New York on the ground that the killing was in self-defense.

Herewith, the plot as invested by Mr. Goulding with "modern Hollywood overtones":

Venetia Ryan, a quondam actress in the *Ziegfeld Follies* (a good glamour role for Betty Grable) and now being more or less platonically kept by a middle-aged, handsome and charming man (a good role for Don Ameche or Adolphe Menjou), was at the age of sixteen the mistress of a suave gangster (a good role for either the play's movie incumbent, Lowe, or Cesar Romero) by whom she had a child, which she had placed in the keeping of a *Follies* girl friend (a good role for Lana Turner) when the gangster (after marrying her to satisfy the movie morals code) betook himself to Venezuela (excellent for Technicolor) in hiding from a murder rap. With the passing of the years, the child grows up into handsome young manhood, enters the Army, and becomes a hero (a good role for Van Johnson or Jimmy Stewart). Venetia, whom he does not know to be his mother, longs in her heart to clasp him, upon his return to receive the Congressional Medal, to her maternal bosom. But, hiding her ache, she keeps silent. One day the door is suddenly thrown open and there on the threshold stands the gangster, the shadow of her past, who has come back to blackmail her, and her house of cards threatens to

tumble about her. Follows the big confrontation scene appropriated by the movies from fifty plays ranging from *Camille* to *The Easiest Way* and beloved by film audiences for years in such gangster films as Edward G. Robinson, Ricardo Cortez, *et al.*, have appeared in, at the end of which Venetia shoots and kills the villain to save her son from knowing disgrace. And the curtain falls with the intimation that she will go free, since a good case can be made out that the gangster, fearful of being recaptured by the police (a fine effect can be managed here with a shot of five hundred policemen speeding to the scene in fifty motor cars), committed suicide (thus safely adhering to the Johnston office code of necessary retribution).

June Havoc, making her first appearance on the dramatic stage, imparted to the evening its sole interest with a performance that, while still indicating a lack of sufficient experience and training, contained symptoms of future accomplishment. Mr. Goulding's direction was such, however, that it would have baffled the talents of a Bernhardt.

Such Hollywood products as this lead one to a reconsideration of why it is that Hollywood seems to be to literature and drama what the *spirochete pallida* is to the human blood-stream. The usual and favorite arguments are three in number. Let us scrutinize them.

First, it is said that the large sums of money so handily come by conduce to spoil a writer and make him indifferent to the quality of his work. This strikes me as nonsense. Money in even larger amounts never spoiled Shaw, Galsworthy, Maugham, O'Neill and many other such men, nor did it make them indifferent to the quality of their writing. The theory that a man with money in the bank is inevitably a lesser artist than one who has to go out and borrow a quarter is the remaining privilege of sentimental school-girls and French novelists.

Secondly, it is said that the Hollywood climate tends to soften the brain, make the body lazy, and dispirit the imagination. In other words, that the warm earth and blue skies and gentle breezes depress enterprise and make a writer happily content to loaf at the expense of his work.

This also strikes me as nonsense, for while it may induce such a reaction in the case of writers without talent and honest ambition, who would never amount to anything anyway, there is little reason to believe that it would have any such effect upon any worth their salt. Similar climate, indeed climate infinitely more conducive to lotus-eating, did not and has not in the least minimized or defeated the work and purpose of many such men as Robert Louis Stevenson, Lafcadio Hearn, Anatole France, the earlier Robert Hichens, W. H. Hudson, Norman Douglas, George Santayana, and dozens of others. The theory that a writer who sticks to a climate so chill and damp that he catches pneumonia alone can manage good writing, whereas one who hies himself to warmth and comfort is bound in time to become a hack, if indeed he is by nature not already one, is the privileged theory in turn of such connoisseurs as esteem a literatus like Henryk Sienkiewicz above one like Max Beerbohm.

Thirdly, it is said that the low mentality of the various people a writer is forced to associate with in Hollywood must obviously after a protracted period reduce him to much their own level. This still further strikes me as nonsense, at least in the way of necessary fact. Its corollary would be the idea that estimable writers outside Hollywood have as their constant companions nothing but profound philosophers, great artistic geniuses, and women with fifteen-pound brains. Many of the best writers who ever lived have been surrounded, through choice or otherwise, by persons of either sex hardly notable for gifts more cerebral and spiritual than those associated with the bottle, babble, boudoir, and bed. One of the foremost older writers in later day America had as his favorite cronies taxi drivers, widowed chorus girls, and the Greenwich Village species of political sages. One of the foremost younger has pugs, bartenders, and waiters.

The real poison of Hollywood, one accordingly suspects, does not lie specifically in any of these three directions or in all three together, though one or another or all in combination may conceivably exercise their influence in cer-

tain cases. The real poison, the poison that kills off so many writers and particularly those who aspire to write for the theatre, is found on another shelf and is similarly in three bottles. Confining ourselves to writers for the theatre, let us regard them.

First, the necessary nature of Hollywood writing itself. Screen plays bear no more resemblance to reputable plays for the stage than pulp fiction bears to Dostoievski. They rely, even at their best, upon superficial dramatic trickery, vaudeville humor that will appeal to the masses, servant girl innuendo, and easily assimilated plot. Their character study is relegated mainly to expressions on the actors' faces, and their literary quality, if any, is limited to a few lines which the author by hook or crook succeeds in getting into them over the dead bodies of executives, directors, and the star players. It is, of course, possible that a writer with dramatic stage potentialities may surrender his talents to such abortive art for a short time without damaging himself. But it is unbelievable that one who works in any such juvenile and trashy medium for a longer time can retain any sense of honorable proportion and not find himself, like a man who has taken too many sleeping pills, debilitated and eventually laid low by it.

Secondly, the screen writer is seldom allowed to be an independent craftsman. He is compelled to work in conjunction not only with other writers but with an editorial mess of executives, directors, actors, and what not. He writes a screen play that comes out not from a pen or typewriter but most frequently from a conference, either before, during, or after. Decent writing can not be achieved, it need hardly be said, in any such manner. Sound drama is an independent effort, or the effort of proud and sympathetic collaboration between two men at most. One cannot expect the hand of a man who has worked for a considerable period in an assembly factory to retain the delicacy of fingers necessary to diamond cutting.

Thirdly, the mental atmosphere in which the Hollywood writer, even when he sequesters himself, has to conduct his writing. Honest as he would choose to be, he well

knows that if he is to keep his job he must bear in mind not only the complex and senseless taboos of the Johnston office but the prejudices of the important executives and the tastes of the exhibitors, to say nothing of the personal eccentricities of the screen stars for whom he is writing. His work thus resolves itself not into something he would prefer to write but into something haunted by a lot of ghosts smoking big cigars, wearing pith helmets and shouting through megaphones, or adorned with aphrodisiacal sweaters and less aphrodisiacal slacks. To anticipate such a writer's subsequent emergence as an uncorrupted writer of drama is to anticipate the emergence of an eagle from an ant hill.

The stage has been invaded in the last three or four seasons by many Hollywood scribblers, the preponderant majority of whom have revealed themselves pathetically as hacks and worse. Even in the rare instances where they have managed plays, apart from mere dramatizations, which have been successful at the box-office, some of them have had to be revised by non-Hollywood playwrights and still then have remained primarily, from a critical viewpoint, so much taradiddle. Mud, as the aphorism goes, has an embarrassing way of clinging to one's shoes.

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## YOU TOUCHED ME! SEPTEMBER 25, 1945

*A play by Tennessee Williams and Donald Windham, based on a story by D. H. Lawrence. Produced by Guthrie McClintic in association with Lee Shubert for 109 forced performances in the Booth Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

MATILDA ROCKLEY

*Marianne Stewart*

EMMIE ROCKLEY

*Catherine Willard*

PHOEBE

*Norah Howard*

HADRIAN

*Montgomery Clift*

CORNELIUS ROCKLEY

*Edmund Gwenn*

THE REVEREND GUILDFORD

MELTON

*Neil Fitzgerald*

A POLICEMAN *Freeman Hammond*

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *Morning.* Scene 2. *Sunset, the same day.* Act II. Scene 1. *Late that evening.* Scene 2. *The following morning.* Act III. Scene 1. *Late the same night.* Scene 2. *Dawn, the following morning.*

*The action takes place in a house in rural England in the spring of 1943.*

Director: *Guthrie McClintic.*

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THE CHARACTERS in Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* are a mother who dominates her daughter and whose one wish is to get her married; a migratory son given to drink who brusquely tries to reduce the mother to some gentle understanding and who also tries to get the girl married; the girl herself who struggles against the bonds imposed upon her; and a young man brought into the household by her brother for the purpose of matrimony but who gets away.

The chief characters in this *You Touched Me!*, which Williams has written in collaboration with another and which is based on a story of the same name by the late D. H. Lawrence, are an aunt who dominates her niece and whose one wish is to keep her from getting married; her migratory brother given to drink who brusquely tries to reduce the aunt to some gentle understanding and who tries to get the girl married; the girl herself who struggles

against the bonds imposed upon her; and a young man brought into the household by the brother for the purpose of matrimony who doesn't get away.

The points of similarity, even in paraphrase, lead one to speculate whether the Lawrence story, written many years ago, was not the inspiration also of *The Glass Menagerie*. Williams has said that that play is in essence and character the story of part of his own family. Since its basic ingredients are so generally suggestive of this later play — if indeed it is a later one and was not actually conceived before the other — a suspicion arises that Lawrence's story may very possibly have encouraged Williams' initial impulse to recast his family's approximate story into play form and that, further and more significantly, the ghost of Lawrence firmly guided his hand.

Of the two plays, *The Glass Menagerie* is infinitely the better, what with its adroit editing by other hands and its uncommonly understanding direction and staging. Such editing, most necessary, and such direction and staging are completely absent in this case, and the result is a exhibit that hovers ineffectually between realism and foggy fancy. While, as noted, there is an intrinsic identity in the two plays and while the tune, save for the coda, which they play is basically not altogether dissimilar, the instruments of *The Glass Menagerie* are violins and cellos whereas those of *You Touched Me!* are ill-assorted xylophones and cornets.

Several passages in the play are fairly amusing, but these, like the monologue about the lady porpoise and the dumb show about a fox licking his chops over purloined chickens, have the air of incorporated vaudeville. The play itself is repetitious and often, by virtue of hitting the same note over and over again, monotonous and static. The final impression is of a poor mixture of Smollett, Lawrence, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Guest In The House*, and Keith and Proctor.

Mr. McClintic's direction is a compound of various antagonistic styles which further confuse the acting. Edmund Gwenn thus becomes a cross between a straight character

and Captain Andy out of *Show Boat*. Catherine Willard wobbles between a Craig's wife, a deep Mrs. Sykes, and the comical female in *George Washington Slept Here*. And Marianne Stewart, as the beset niece, has been directed into something half-way between an Ibsen character and Little Nell. Only Montgomery Clift, in the role of the young man who eventually takes her for wife, emerges with a degree of conviction, though the long juvenile speech on the world's future which he is forced to speak proves something of a trial both to him and the audience.

The three-level setting by Motley is perfect, if not for this play as it has been produced, for it had it been more properly and astutely staged as farce. By directing it to be played as such Mr. McClintic might have saved it from failure, as other producers in the past have skilfully managed with similar defaulting plays, and as Eddie Dowling managed so handsomely only last season with the author's *The Glass Menagerie*.

In an interview following the auspicious New York opening of that play, Mr. Williams delivered himself as follows: "Not a line was changed after the final draft came back from the typist. A scene was inserted, the drunk scene. That was Mr. Dowling's idea, but entirely of my authorship. And one line by Mr. Dowling was added, the last line where he says to the audience, 'Here's where memory stops and your imagination begins.' "

In addition to his mistake as to the aforesaid line which concludes his play and which reads "There my memory ends — and your imagination begins," Mr. Williams fell curiously into other errors. His narrator character was tricked out of an audience's possible surfeit with such characters by a passage shrewdly incorporated into it by Dowling. The drunk scene to which he refers and which Dowling wisely perceived was necessary to the play was rewritten by Williams no less than four times under Dowling's supervision, and was subsequently amplified in more than one particular — the reference to the stage as opposed to the moving pictures, for example — by Dowling himself. And many of the mother's lines, while their es-



sence remained intact, were rephrased by Laurette Taylor to their very much better effect. So, too, with a number of the son's lines, which Dowling altered and elaborated upon.

But there were more important additions and deletions in the original script. As written and as may be appreciated from a glance at the published version, which Williams himself has edited, the play contained a screen on which a magic lantern projected pictures and silent film titles throughout its action. At thirty-nine different periods, the play was interrupted by flashing on the screen colored pictures of roses, sailing boats, snowy landscapes, moons, etc., along with such idiotic old silent film titles as "Laura, Haven't You Ever Liked Some Boy?," "A Pretty Trap!," "Not Jim!," "Terror!," "Ah!," "I Don't Suppose You Remember Me At All!," "What Have You Done Since High School?," "The Sky Falls!," and "And So Good-bye . . ." All this, which beyond doubt would have made the play ridiculous, was promptly cut out by Dowling. (It is, apparently and incidentally, Williams' belief that he had devised something very original in such business. The idea was used many years ago by Piscator in the Berlin theatre.) Dowling further invented the scene on the fire-escape in which the crippled Laura listens toward hope to the music from the dance hall across the way. It is not only one of the most touching episodes in the play, but it is practically demanded, since without it Laurette Taylor's Amanda would have insufficient time in which to make the costume change specified by the playwright. There is no intention to detract from Mr. Williams' share in the success of the evening. But these and various additional contributions by hands other than his own went a long, a very long, way toward guaranteeing it.

Mr. McClintic in a like manner might at least have made better entertainment out of this *You Touched Me!* had he, as observed, transformed it into farce by pacing it out of its present doldrums, by directing the actors out of their present labor pains, by deleting such passages of childish philosophy as the one previously alluded to, by brushing

aside such Williams greeting-card poesy as "You are as delicate as those little cotton things floating in the air," such cliché writing as "Together, we'll put up a solid front!" and such worn devices as having a character apologize after making an unduly long speech, and by cutting out the borrowed Lawrence sex symbolism.

It would not have been the first time that a play has been spared frustration by such strategy. Many years ago, one called *Castle Sombras*, by Greenhough Smith, an Englishman, which was written as a grimly serious romantic drama, was transformed from certain failure into success by the late Richard Mansfield who, as its producer and leading actor, suddenly decided to play it as a travesty. So well did Mansfield's chicane work that a play doomed to be received with catcalls was hailed by the newspaper critics as one of the cleverest burlesques of its species ever written, worthy of the sardonic wit of a Bernard Shaw. Many years later George M. Cohan performed a similar service for an item called *The Tavern*, the handiwork of a lady of strictly amateur standing whose name has long since evaporated into limbo. What the lady had confected was a solemn melodrama destined in view of its parade of stencils for immediate deposit in the nearest storehouse. Like Mansfield, Cohan as its producer bethought him to present it as a parody of itself and the consequent hilarity of audiences, so humiliating to its playwright-mother, turned it into a roaring popular success. Still later, Edwin Justus Mayer wrote, in *The Firebrand*, what he venerated as a moonlit slice of romance. Lawrence Schwab and others connected with its management and production preferred to regard it as nothing of the kind, caused it, to the author's anguish, to be played for comedy, and turned a doubtful property into a success that achieved a New York run of two hundred and sixty-one performances.

The unwritten history of our theatre is full of other such instances of plays which, had they been presented as originally written, would doubtless have met with disaster but which producers, directors and even actors have in one way or another tricked or maneuvered into box-office proper-

ties. It thus on occasion has been that a playwright has received praise from deceived critics which he has scarcely merited and which, had the facts been appreciated, should rightly have been the portion of other hands.

For endless years *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was one of the greatest bonanzas that the American theatre has known. It was played all over the country season after season by any number of troupes and, all things considered, its biggest box-office magnet, as everyone recalls, was the spectacle of Eliza crossing the ice and pursued by a variable number of bloodhounds, or reasonable facsimiles thereof. When the play was first produced in the Charles Taylor dramatization in the August of 1852, Eliza crossed the ice right enough but there wasn't a bloodhound, or even so much as a French poodle, in sight. What dogs there were were confined to the howling larynx of one Joe Mitchell, a stagehand. Since Mr. Mitchell was a son of Erin and reportedly given to spirituous liquors, the howls sometimes took on the timbre and nuances less of the beasts supposedly associated with them than of Joe himself being thrown out of a drink parlor by the bouncer, to his righteous indignation. The scene accordingly may be said to have lacked an inner brio, which the audience was not long in realizing. Furthermore, not only did the playwright omit the bloodhounds but in his play there was no trace of either Topsy or Little Eva.

When, one month and three days later in September of the same year, the George Aiken dramatization, which is the best known of all the many stage versions of the novel, came along, both Little Eva and Topsy were profitably present, but still there were no bloodhounds and still the audience, for all the ominous noises made by the stagehands, felt cheated. Though the show was nevertheless a success it was only when the playwright's cousin, a theatre manager named George C. Howard, was instrumental in persuading him to insert two real bloodhounds into it that it was set upon the long golden road. The animals were subsequently amplified to three, four, five, and eventually six, and it was the advertisements of 6 — Bloodhounds — 6

that in your youth and mine induced us to filch those quarters out of papa's trousers' pockets while he was taking a bath.

William Vaughn Moody, a member of the faculty at Harvard and subsequently the University of Chicago, startled the critics in 1906 with a play named *The Great Divide*, which was acclaimed by many of them as the Great American Drama. What awed them chiefly was that a novice had been able to execute so remarkably adroit a piece of dramaturgy. What they did not know was that the play during its rehearsal by Henry Miller was found to be wholly lopsided and that only when Miller figured out that it should be played hind end foremost, that is, its third act where its first was and vice versa, did it manage the effect which Moody had hoped for. That is the way it was finally played and that is the way the admiring critics saw it.

Arthur Hopkins, the producer of the worthy Anderson-Stallings *What Price Glory?*, unquestionably helped that play to success by eliminating what would have been a vitiating anti-climax to its middle act. As written, the death of the soldier was followed by some fifteen or so minutes of dialogue which the authors highly esteemed. Though there was something to be said for their esteem of it, it nevertheless prolonged the scene out of all sound proportion and it was only when Hopkins exercised his persuasions upon them that it was deleted, that the curtain was brought down at the psychologically right audience moment, and that the play mounted in bounce and drive. In the same way, it was outside influence that impressed upon the generally very astute Sean O'Casey the fact that the diminuendo singing of the Salvation Army would drop completely the effect of an important act curtain in his *Within The Gates* and that a crescendo burst of song must take its place. The change at least caused the play to run longer than it might otherwise have.

Though entirely devoid of any artistic integrity, David Belasco knew the box-office as few producers before or after him have known it and was responsible for the com-

mercial prosperity of any number of plays that without his ministrations would have stood little chance. The character of Laura Murdock, as Eugene Walter wrote it in *The Easiest Way*, was a kept woman with small sympathetic appeal for a popular audience, and if presented as the author conceived it would undoubtedly have had a hard time holding an audience's interest. By visiting upon the character all kinds of such hocus pocus as placing dolls on her dressing-table to suggest her innate childlike innocence, cutting out a number of her retorts to her broker protector and substituting for them a wide-eyed silence to indicate her beaten weakness, etc., Belasco converted her into the materials for matinée slobbers — and the play harvested the sentimental public's dollars.

Dialogue surgery has never been negotiated on so wholesale a scale, and to a play's profit, as in the case of J. Hartley Manners' *The Patriot*, written as a vehicle for Willie Collier. I happened to see the rehearsals and tryout of the comedy in Atlantic City — that was many years ago — and when Collier as producer, director and leading actor got through with the script at least thirty pages of dialogue had been thrown out and his silent pantomime and stage business substituted for them to bountiful comic effect.

Rose Franken's *Another Language* was originally conceived as dealing with a Jewish household. If I am not mistaken, it was Arthur Beckhard, her producer, who prevailed upon her to broaden the box-office appeal of the play by eliminating the Jewish slant which, duly done, converted it into the hit it was.

The vicissitudes of Bayard Veiller's *Within The Law* before it was whipped into the shape that resulted in a run of 541 performances on Broadway, and with as many as eight companies playing it simultaneously on the road, are fairly well known, but there was one element connected with its ultimate success that is not. Though many changes were made in the play by Edgar Selwyn and A. H. Woods, with Lee Shubert its final producers, and though they improved it enormously, there persisted from its earlier failure in Chicago a grim hangover in the shape of the silencer

on the revolver with which the climactic shooting was done. It was dramatically essential that the shooting be accomplished silently but, since the invention of the silencer was relatively new, audiences long used to a revolver's loud explosion simply would not believe that the business was possible. It was all-important, plainly, that they should; otherwise, one of the play's biggest moments would go for naught. Veiller himself had no solution to offer and things looked hopeless until Selwyn and Woods put their heads together and "planted" the workability of the silencer in the audience's mind by causing the revolver earlier in the action to be tested against an ornament on the mantelpiece, which with the aid of an electrically controlled hammer secreted inside it duly broke into smithereens when the silent gun was fired.

The comic embroideries which the Messrs. Lindsay and Crouse, the play's producers, visited upon Joseph Kesselring's *Arsenic And Old Lace* and which contributed so much to its affluence bulk large in the esoterica of Broadway. John Barrymore's ribald ad-libbing and humorous self-criticism made a box-office success of Catherine Turney's and Jerry Horwin's *My Dear Children*, which minus them would by general consent have put an audience to sleep. With them as a nightly lure, the exhibit ran for thirty-three weeks in Chicago and managed one hundred and seventeen performances in New York. In more remote days, it was an actress in the company who, when Louis N. Parker's *Disraeli* went flat at the end of its most important act and when Parker confessed himself at a loss for a way to fix matters, devised the proper, ringing curtain line and saved the play.

Last season provided a further illuminating example of the manner in which a canny producer has overcome a reluctant playwright in setting his or her play on the road to fortune. Mary Chase, the author of *Harvey*, wrote a visible large rabbit into her script and fought against Brock Pemberton's plea that it be invisible in the interest of the audience's imagination. To please her, the producer let her have her way at the Boston tryout, where it became

slowly apparent to her that the rabbit *in propria persona* damaged her play no end. Had she persisted in her determination to show the rabbit, it is dollars to doughnuts that *Harvey* would have been an abrupt failure instead of the sensational success it is.

In conclusion, Mr. McClintic might perhaps also have rubbed his rabbit's-foot into better luck by eliminating the exclamation point from the *You Touched Me!* title. While the exclamation point may not always portend bad fortune at the box-office in the case of musical shows, as *Okla-homa!* and a few others have attested, it often in the case of straight plays in these later years does. (Even in the musical direction, it has been a black cat for shows like *Allah Be Praised!*, *Sing Out, Sweet Land!*, *Viva O'Brien!*, *Mum's The Word!*, *et al.*) Among the plays that have suffered its curse in recent seasons have been *Oh, Brother!*, *Try And Get It!*, *Lady, Behave!*, *Listen, Professor!*, *Don't George!*, *Signature!*, *It's A Gift!*, *Quiet, Please!*, *What Big Ears!*, *Comes The Revelation!*, and a sufficient number of others.

## DEEP ARE THE ROOTS. SEPTEMBER 26, 1945

*A play by Arnaud d'Usseau and James Gow. Produced by Kermit Bloomgarden and George Heller for a beyond the season run in the Fulton Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

HONEY TURNER	Helen Martin	ROY MAXWELL	Harold Vermilyea
BELLA CHARLES	Evelyn Ellis	HOWARD MERRICK	Lloyd Gough
SENATOR ELLSWORTH LANGDON		BRETT CHARLES	Gordon Heath
	Charles Waldron	SHERIFF SERKIN	Andrew Leigh
GENEVRA LANGDON		CHUCK WARREN	George Dice
	Barbara Bel Geddes	BOB IZAY	Douglas Rutherford
ALICE LANGDON	Carol Goodner		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. A mid-morning in late May. Act II. An afternoon, a week later. Act III. Evening of the same day.

Scene. The living-room of the Langdon home on the outskirts of a small town in the deep South. It is spring, 1945.

Director: Elia Kazan.

THE AUTHORS all too evidently believe that in this treatment of Negro prejudice in the deep South they have achieved something newly sensational and have been encouraged in the belief by their audiences and by a number of their admiring critics. It may disappoint them, along with their audiences and the critics aforesaid, to know that their play, while in no slightest sense plagiaristic, now and then suggests one written thirty-seven years ago, to wit, Edward Sheldon's *The Nigger*, which was produced in 1909 in the New Theatre in Central Park West. The plot machinery differs, but some of its thematic current and some of its contributing streams are much alike. The contemporary note rests largely in putting the Negro protagonist into a World War II uniform.

This protagonist returns to the South as a war hero who has been accepted on terms of equality in England and Italy, but who finds that the old prejudice is still, as in the past, turbulent in his homeland. In the end, he refuses the



offer by his white benefactress of a chance to go North and elects to remain where he is to work for the betterment of his people who badly need his help, meanwhile declining marriage with the white daughter of the aristocratic family in which his mother has been a life-long servant and whom since childhood he has distantly loved. In *The Nigger*, the Negro protagonist is similarly offered the chance to go North by his white benefactress but refuses in basically similar terms (I omit the dialect): "No, that won't do. Senator Long showed me the way — he didn't know it, but he did. It's the only one that's open to me — I couldn't take any other if I wanted. I've got to work for the niggers, shoulder to shoulder, because I'm a nigger myself, and because they need me awful bad!"

In the present play, the young white girl protests her love for the Negro, declares her willingness to marry him, answers his doubts by telling him that they can go far away and be happy, and is answered by him in turn that they would inevitably find themselves living on what he describes as an "island." In *The Nigger*, the young Southern white girl similarly protests her love for the Negro — "Yes, I love you; I don't care who you are or what you do; I don't care if everybody in the world goes back on you . . ."; similarly declares her willingness to marry him; similarly answers his doubts by telling him that they can go far away and be happy — "We'll go North and be married up there; you'll begin all over again . . ."; and is similarly answered by him in turn that they would inevitably find themselves with a "black gulf" between them — "We can stretch out our hands from either side, but they won't meet!" There are further various other points of approximate identity. And the characters in both plays, in addition to the Negro protagonist and the white girl who loves him, embrace, among others, the protagonist's mammy, a Senator, and the inevitable sheriff.

Out of these scarcely fresh materials the present authors have fashioned, if not anything as revolutionary as they think, a melodrama which at least satisfies that liberal portion of an audience which does not stop to analyze its

factual and psychological deficiencies and accepts as soundly stimulating drama what is often dubious drama-turgy drugged into a semblance of inner vitality. To the analytical few, the play, while here and there automatically effective by virtue of its theme's natural drive, seems in general to be largely a *PM* editorial additionally melodramatized in terms that alternately suggest the Thomas Dixon of *The Clansman* and the Langston Hughes of *Mulatto*.

The stage direction by Elia Kazan, for all the circumstance that he expressed in an interview the peculiar belief that "it's really like an Ibsen play," helped the script considerably. And the performance of Barbara Bel Geddes in the role of the young white girl in love with the Negro helped those scenes in the script in which she figured quite as much.

Up to this very early point in the season, the stage had already disclosed no less than four exhibits either wholly or in part Negro, and no less than four with Negroes figuring as sympathetic characters, which led one ironically to speculate that, if things continued at that pace, the day might eventually come when one would have to go down to the Barter Theatre in Virginia to see a white actor on a stage. The prospect was and is fairly intelligible. The Negroes have proved themselves and have fully earned their estate. And the first paradoxically to agree are the very whites who are in some danger of being one day ousted by them. It is these whites who have cheered the theme of this *Deep Are The Roots* and the performances of Gordon Heath and the other Negro players involved in it as they surely greeted no white-theme, white-acted exhibit thus far in the season. It was these whites who on a committee composed of actors, producers and critics of their own race at the end of the previous season awarded the Derwent prize for the best performance of a supporting player not to a white actor but to the Negro Frederick O'Neal. It was ten out of sixteen of these whites among the play reviewers who subsequently singled out from white actors for highest respect in that same category that same Negro actor,

and who further in part endorsed Alice Childress, a Negro actress, above such white actresses as Catherine Proctor, Doro Merande and Catherine Willard, and Hilda Simms, the Negro actress, above such whites as Carol Stone, Mary Welch, and others.

Paul Robeson in *Othello* drew crowds to theatres both in New York and all over the country for more than a solid year, and Canada Lee in *The Tempest* helped to establish a New York record run for that play. The applause that nightly greeted Bill Robinson in *Memphis Bound* was immensely louder than that which greeted either Victor Moore or William Gaxton in *Hollywood Pinafore*. And were the connoisseurs talking at the time of any of the pretty white girls in the shows around town? Not noticeably. Their enthusiasm in a pictorial direction was reserved for Sheila Guys, acushla, who appeared with Robinson in that same *Memphis Bound*. Lena Horne, another beauty, was prayerfully but vainly sought by half a dozen white producers both in this season and in last. Oscar Polk, whenever he has appeared on the stage, has received notices, even in the minor roles he has played, often far superior to the white actors in the same companies. The American Negro Theatre, situated up Harlem way, has proved to be the most interesting of all the experimental groups and the whites have had a hard time trying to attract equal notice to their own similar enterprises. *Porgy and Bess* and *Carmen Jones* have been hailed with an enthusiasm denied the great majority white shows; Ethel Waters in *Mamba's Daughters* was originally a sensation, and continues still to fetch in audiences on the Subway circuit; Ammons, Johnson and Catlett, the boogie-woogie pianists and luxe drummer, brought down the house at Billy Rose's *Concert Varieties*, as did Katherine Dunham and her colored dancing troupe, whereas Eddie Mayehoff, Zero Mostel, Imogene Coca, and suchlike whites left it cold.

Dance teams like the Berry Brothers and singing teams like the Charioteers and the Inkspots occupy our stages, and to handclapping that can be heard down the block. Colored musicians purvey their swing and jazz to audi-

ences who avidly eat them up. *Anna Lucasta* was one of the biggest successes in recent seasons. Fats Waller's music and the colored Jeni Le Gon put over *Early To Bed*. The only characters in plays like *Decision*, *Men To The Sea*, and *No Way Out* which Caucasian audiences have found to be in the least sympathetic have been the Negroes in them. One of the most moving scenes in Sidney Kingsley's prize-winning *The Patriots* was that in which Thomas Jefferson's Negro servant figured. Another was that in *Outrageous Fortune* involving the white heroine's colored maid. And among the most prosperous comedy scenes in plays like *Chicken Every Sunday*, *Dear Ruth*, etc., have been those involving colored actresses. The outstanding item in *Bloomer Girl*, and by common consent the most successful, is the Negro singer Richard Huey. Avon Long, whatever show he appears in, seems to stimulate an audience no end. Ada Brown, Anne Brown, Etta Moten, Edith Wilson, and various other such colored songbirds regularly prove to be hits. The Delta Rhythm Boys and the King Cole Trio are wows; plays about Negroes, like the Negro Richard Wright's *Native Son*, draw heavy trade; and the customers can not get enough of Josh White.

White plays dealing sympathetically with the Negro like, for example, *Harriet*, are warmly embraced by audiences and score long runs. "The Act — The Fugitive Slave Act — makes fugitives of American decency and honor! Think what it means, *Harriet*! Think what it does to the rights of the human being; not just to the slave, but to you, and me, and the man down the street! If I permit a freezing Negro to sleep in my barn — if I so much as give him a crust of bread, I am a criminal!" And the house cheers its head off.

With Shakespeare's Juliet now played by a Negress, where it will all end is not easy to foretell. Ethel Barrymore, if she wishes to retain favor, will probably have to go back and revive herself in her old colored role in *Scarlet Sister Mary*. Lenore Ulric, after a long stretch of failures, may again have to try to find herself in the chips by digging up her old Negress role in *Lulu Belle*. Walter Hampden,

to preserve himself, may have to black up and team with Dooley Wilson, who always has good jobs and who goes over big. If they revive *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Little Eva may perhaps more acceptably be played by Butterfly McQueen, who got such notices when she last appeared on the New York stage as have more usually been bestowed upon Lillian Russell and St. Luke.

The wave of the future seems already to have splashed up on the theatre's shore. Colored actresses like Carlotta Franzell, Muriel Smith, Elton Warren, Inez Matthews, Muriel Rahn and many such others adorn the musical stage, as do all kinds of colored actors like Todd Duncan, Kenneth Spencer, Luther Saxon, Napoleon Reed, Glenn Bryant, and Melvin Howard. The dramatic stage, which last season alone exhibited all of twenty-nine plays and shows containing colored players, is embellished by Negroes like Georgie Burke, George Randol, Alvin Childress, Ruby Dee, John Tate, Earle Hyman, Ossie Davis, Viola Dean, Ruby Elzy, who is also gifted in musicals, Georgette Harvey, Hilda Offley, Beulah E. Edmonds, George and Harry Ingram, Columbus Jackson, and countless others. Colored playwrights like Abram Hill, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Arna Bontemps, *et al.*, flavor the boards. Even the children's theatre finds itself most publicly acceptable when something like *Horseplay* is purveyed by an all-Negro cast.

The notion that this is all perhaps just a passing phenomenon and that it will not be long before things go back to normal may not hold water. The portents have long been in the air, and the situation has long cast its shadows before. The success of the several *Blackbirds* shows, the great popularity of such comedians as the late Bert Williams and such singers as the late Florence Mills, the extended runs of Negro musical comedies like *Cabin In The Sky*, the warm welcome of actresses like Rose McClendon and actors like Richard B. Harrison, the Pulitzer prizes awarded to plays about Negroes like *In Abraham's Bosom* and *The Green Pastures*, and the interest developed in Negro subjects by white playwrights like Eugene

O'Neill, Paul Green, John Wexley, Jim Tully, DuBose and Dorothy Heyward, Edward Sheldon, Laurence Stallings, and William J. Rapp, among many others, have amply hinted at what was coming. And hinting even more significantly was the fact that numerous white comedians like Al Jolson, Eddie Cantor, and Frank Tinney actually had to black up in order to gain the favor of their audiences.

The current stage in this general respect is simply a reflection of the tremendous popularity of Negroes in other quarters. The crowds that swarm into the concert halls to hear Marian Anderson, Dorothy Maynor and Roland Hayes, the radio audiences that cry for the humor of a Rochester, now become a national figure, the widespread reader interest in novels about the Negro like *Strange Fruit* and in Negro-written philosophical treatises like W. E. Burghardt DuBois' *Color And Democracy*, the night club enthusiasm for entertainers like Hazel Scott and for bands like Armstrong's, Basie's, Ellington's, Sissle's, Benny Carter's, and Cab Calloway's, the applause for blues singers like Billie Holiday, the enthusiasm for a Negro-conducted Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, the ring box-office lure of all sorts of colored prize-fighters, the critical acclaim for biographies like that of George Washington Carver, the Houghton Mifflin and Doubleday prizes awarded to the Negro authors of the novels, *The Street* and *Mrs. Palmer's Honey* — such things make even easier to comprehend what has happened in the theatre. And yet easier still is the situation to be understood when we read the opinion of a Philadelphia music critic, duly recorded in the public prints, that "Caruso, Melba and Tetrzzini on a single bill could never have attracted so great a throng as jammed the Academy of Music last night for Dizzy Gillespie's concert."

In the theatre today the colored Hall Johnson choir gets all the applause that various white groups of singers fail to; some colored chorus girl like Joyce Beasley, for example, attracts all the admiring attention that a whole line of white girls does not; the sight of a small colored child on a stage induces all the audience raptures that once were the por-

tion of the white little Fauntleroy and Edithas; and Cosy Cole's drums have taken over the thrills that were the property of Eugene O'Neill's Emperor Jones. And out of the theatre the whites are dancing the Negro's dances, playing his numbers game, shooting his favorite craps, eating his mammy's fried chicken dinners, and lying in the sun hopefully trying to look like him.

Maybe it's all for the best.

## CARIB SONG. SEPTEMBER 27, 1945

*A musical exhibit, book and lyrics by William Archibald, score by Baldwin Bergersen. Produced by George Stanton for 36 performances and a loss of 150,000 dollars in the Adelphi Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

THE SINGER	Harriet Jackson	THE FISHERMAN	Avon Long
THE FRIENDS	{ Eulabel Riley	THE FISHERWOMAN	Elsie Benjamin
	Mary Lewis	THE SHANGO PRIEST	
THE FAT WOMAN			La Rosa Estrada
	Mable Sanford Lewis	THE BOY POSSESSED BY A SNAKE	
THE TALL WOMAN			Tommy Gomez
	Mercedes Gilbert	THE LEADERS	
THE HUSBAND	William Franklin	OF THE SHANGO	Vanoye Aikens
THE MADRAS SELLER	Byron Cuttler	DANCERS	Lucille Ellis
THE WOMAN	Katherine Dunham		

**SYNOPSIS:** *Entire action takes place in a West Indian village.*

Act I. Scene 1. *The wake.* Scene 2. *Early morning by the river.* Scene 3. *The new house.* Scene 4. *The corn sorting.* Scene 5. *The lie.* Scene 6. *The road to the Shango.* Scene 7. *The Shango.* Act II. *Three months later.* Scene 1. *Market, dry season.* Scene 2. *"Today I Is So Happy."* Scene 3. *The forest at night.* Scene 4. *"Go to Church Sunday."* Scene 5. *"Wash Clothes Monday."* Scene 6. *The rain comes.*

Directors: *Katherine Dunham and Mary Hunter.*

**M**ISS DUNHAM has earned a deserved reputation for her choreography and for her personal performances in that art, but her ambitions toward acting and singing have here, alas, led her into error. She is not an actress and considerably less so a singer and her capricious determination to be both has resulted in the present misadventure. What she and her associates have sponsored is not, as billed, a musical play of the West Indies but rather simply a portion of her familiar *Tropical Revue* over which, in order to give her an opportunity to act and sing, has been spread a feeble paraphrase of the triangle plot of *Porgy And Bess*. "The only obligation to which in advance we may hold a novel,



without incurring the accusation of being arbitrary," said Henry James, "is that it be interesting." And so with a play or show. Miss Dunham's is dull, excessively. Monotony rules the stage. Bergersen's music, while here and there not without some compositional merit, is too much in a single key and manner for an entire evening; Archibald's book repeats and repeats in exhausting monotone; the dancing does likewise; and the staging, including Jo Mielziner's settings, emphasizes the prevailing drone. The whole suggests a minor César Franck's metronomic two-measure fetish personified by a stage full of players directed by a half-asleep Ravel.

A program note reads as follows:

"The lives of West Indian natives often find expression in dances that, while being uninhibited, have certain ritual foundations. For instance, a wake in the West Indies is held in order to entertain the spirit of the departed rather than to mourn for it. At the Shango, a ritual which is based on West African religious practices in combination with Catholic elements (the word Shango meaning Saint John the Baptist), the people often go into a trance. A particular 'spirit' is invited which on possessing the body governs its movements. The spirits of voodoo are numerous; one of the most important is Damballa, one of whose signs is the snake."

Very good, and doubtless true enough. But as put on on this or any other stage the Shango and all other like exotic dance numbers, despite the herring-trail of such program notes, are clearly and openly intended to be not anything ritualistic and religious but rather, what with their profusion of mammary gland agitations, hip rollings and posterior undulations, sensational appeals to the sexual impulses of their audiences. So let the producers stop fooling.

Another program note informs us that Miss Dunham spent more than a year in the West Indies conducting a thorough investigation of their customs and peoples, dances and music, "being permitted to witness secret ceremonies never before seen by strangers to those islands." Miss Dunham thus becomes the latest to have witnessed

these secret ceremonials never before seen by strangers, whose number by this time must run into the thousands. So many such strangers have seen the secret ceremonials in Cuba, Jamaica, Haiti, and other of the islands that the ringside at one of them has often resembled that in Madison Square Garden at a good prize-fight. The last secret ceremonial that I attended in Haiti, for example, had among those present, in addition to my stranger self, William Seabrook, Mr. and Mrs. Charles H. Marshall, Cole Porter, Hermann Oelrichs, J. J. Shubert, a pretty girl from Rochester, N. Y., named Carrington, John Gunther, Margaret Bourke-White, Alfred Knopf, Richard Watts, Jr., Ann Pennington, H. L. Mencken, Lena Horne, Mr. and Mrs. T. Gaillard Thomas, Vincent Astor, Miguel Covarrubias, Dwight Deere Wiman, Rex Smith and wife, Elsa Maxwell, and Jack Kriendler of Jack and Charlie's.

## LIVE LIFE AGAIN. SEPTEMBER 29, 1945

*A play in blank verse by Dan Totheroh. Produced by S. S. Krellberg for 2 performances in the Belasco Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

PREACHER HILL	Edward Bushman	SPIERS	Parker Fennelly
MRS. JONES	Kay MacDonald	NATHAN SPIERS	Zac Charles
MRS. SMITH	Isabelle Bishop	JUDITH SPIERS	Mary Rolfe
MRS. BROWN	Ruth Saville	GREER, THE GRAVEDIGGER	
MRS. WHITE	Phoebe Mackay		John O. Hewitt
MRS. BLACK	Mathilda Baring	MARK ORME	Donald Buka
MRS. GREEN	Florence Beresford	SAUL ORME	Thomas Chalmers
MR. SMITH	Lester Loneragan	JOE	Ken Bowles
MR. JONES	Bruce Halsey	HILDA PAULSON	
MR. BROWN	Pat Smith		Beatrice de Neergaard
MR. WHITE	Robert Gardet	DOCTOR BUSH	Harold McGee
MR. BLACK	Ken Bowles	ROSE	Mary Boylan
MR. GREEN	James Coyle	MRS. HANSEN	Grace Mills

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *The graveyard, mid-summer.* Scene 2. *Saul Orme's house, one month later, morning.* Act II. Scene 1. *Pleasant Grove, a month later, autumn.* Scene 2. *Saul's house, the next day.* Scene 3. *Judith Spier's bedroom, late that night.* Act III. Scene 1. *The Orme house, some weeks later.* Scene 2. *A cornfield near the Orme house, ten minutes later.* Scene 3. *Saul Orme's bedroom, early the next morning.*

*The action takes place near the prairie village of Bison Run, Nebraska, soon after the turn of this century.*

Director: Sawyer Falk.

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MR. TOTHEROTH says that most important of his reasons for laying this play as well as his previous ones in the rural regions "is that cities do not lend themselves as completely as does the countryside to the poetic form of expression." "The sort of poetic excitement I try to achieve," he continues, "springs only from the soil, not from pavements . . . Poetry has always been the dominant idiom of any theatre cycle that we may choose to consider as classic; whether it was the theatre of Athens and Sophocles or of

Elizabeth and Marlowe." He adds, "I am not at all sure that the poetic concept of theatre function will ever be immediately popular, and I doubt if it produces smash hits on Broadway."

Mr. Totheroh thus discloses himself to be a repository of some peculiar ideas. That cities do not lend themselves as completely as the countryside to the poetic form of expression would come as something of a surprise to the man who laid much of the world's greatest dramatic poetry in cities like Athens, Troy, Alexandria, Messina, Mantua, Padua, Verona, Venice, Milan, Marseilles, London, Paris, Vienna, and Rome. And hardly less surprising would it be to the Sophocles and Marlowe whom Mr. Totheroh mentions. I trust it will not be necessary to allude also to some pretty fine poets outside the theatre. Mr. Totheroh, further, gives himself to slightly too great pessimism when he doubts if the poetic concept of theatre function can produce any considerable Broadway hits. It may not produce hits like *Tobacco Road* and *Abie's Irish Rose*, true enough, but it has not done so badly by many plays like *Cyrano*, *Kismet*, *The Jest*, *Winterset*, *High Tor*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Mary Of Scotland*, and *Elizabeth The Queen*. Nor has O'Neill gone regularly to the storehouse. And the theatre of our recent time has provided record runs and sizable profits to revivals of *Romeo And Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *The Tempest*.

The notion — to revert momentarily to the first item in Mr. Totheroh's credo — that poetic excitement springs only from the soil, not from pavements, is the old notion that Nature in the raw is ever more poetically stimulating than when it has been edited, adorned, and embellished by the human hand, and that a cow in a pasture is consequently and inevitably more inspiring to the romantic spirit than a beautiful woman in a drawing-room. Whatever their other faults, there is more poetic excitement sprung from the pavements in a *Winterset* than in a *Live Life Again* sprung from the soil. . . . It requires only an amateur imagination to discern the obvious poetry in green

fields and limpid streams, clouded hills and misty valleys. But it demands the fancy of the true poet to appreciate the full beauty in the wonder of cities built by man.

One fears that Mr. Totheroh is a philosophical innocent, let alone a critical virgin. As a dramatist, he is gifted with personal honor and honorable purpose. He writes what he thinks and believes in and what he feels with no slightest regard to the box-office. Praise to him for that. But the star that he has tried to grasp in this and other of his plays is still countless miles from is eagerly reaching fingers; a bit, a very small bit, of its silver light now and then may illuminate his writings, but for the major part the shimmer is only that of a fabricated duplicate made of cardboard and tinsel.

This latest play, a failure both critically and commercially, essays to sing in blank metre the story of a boy pathologically under the spell of his dead mother and of the tragedy it leads to when ill-founded suspicion as to his father's share in her death befuddles his brain. The verse play which the countryside—in this instance the Nebraska prairie—inspires in the playwright is a bargain-basement combination paraphrase of *Electra* and *Hamlet* replete with such copy-book poesy as "Extinct like a lamp blown out," "This is our tree, and here often we have sat together," and "My love is all I have to give—a thing quite poor," along with such stencils as "You're a woman and I'm a man!," "They're all the things he's learned in books," "God give me strength!," and the kind. And the play which emerges from it all is a turtle vainly trying to master the distance, within a two and one-half hour theatrical time limit, to a mirage a half-foot away.

Sawyer Falk's direction not only took its cue from the turtle but often lent to the stage and actors the appearance of a revival of the *Quincy Adams Sawyer* of forty-four years ago. The evening thus took on less the flavor of what was intended as modern blank verse drama than of one of the rural plays of the remote past wherein the speech, save for the school-teacher heroine, was a bastard cross between down-East Yankee and Robert B. Mantell

and in which character delineation was confined to false whiskers, blue shirts *sans* neckties, and brown store-clothes whose jackets buttoned up to the chin.

The ambitious enterprise in its entirety is best to be described by one of Totheroh's own lines: "I saw your light, and blundered to it like a moth."

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### THREE GIFTS. OCTOBER 1, 1945

*A fantasy by I. L. Peretz dramatized by Melach Ravitch and Maurice Schwartz, with music by Joseph Rumshinsky. Produced by Maurice Schwartz for 11 weeks' performances in the Yiddish Art Theatre.*

#### PROGRAM

MEYER	Abraham Lax	WHITE ANGEL	Leon Gold
CHAIM	Michael Goldstein	DARK ANGEL	Menachem Rubin
SHAMAY	Gustav Berger	JUDGE SUPERIOR	Victor Bergman
LEVY	Yudel Dubinsky	FIRST JUDGE	Morris Bielawsky
PESHEH	Luba Kadison	SECOND JUDGE	Max Tannenbaum
MIREL	Berta Gerstin	WHITE SCRIBE	Jacob Brandis
JOEL	Maurice Schwartz	DARK SCRIBE	Max Rosen
IN-LAW	Sam Levine	WIDOW	Rebecca Weintraub
BADCHAN	Charles Cohan	YOCHANANAN	Isador Cashier
REB AZRIEL	Isidore Elgart	SHACHNEH	Morris Strassberg
HIS WIFE	Lena Marcus	YACHNEH	Celia Pearson
THE RABBI	Abraham Teitelbaum	FIRST PEASANT	Isaac Arco
Director: Maurice Schwartz.			

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**R**ELYING upon a program synopsis in English, one unversed in the play's tongue discovers it to concern a famous violinist equally famous for his affairs of the heart. At the last wedding at which he is engaged to play, he finds that the bride is his current mistress. She implores him to strike up the dance music, but the sight of her in a bridal gown with the bridegroom at her side is more than he can bear, and he dies under the strain. Arrived in Heaven, a tribunal takes stock of his earthly sins, decides to offer him a chance to redeem himself, and gives him a new lease on life in order that he may prove his fitness for celestial residence. To this end, he is ordered to bring back three gifts: soil from the Holy Land, the skull-cap of a rabbi assaulted in a Czarist pogrom, and pins with which a girl had sought to sustain her clothes lest her body be exposed while being dragged through the streets during a Nazi celebration.

"The gifts," continues the synopsis, "tilt the heavenly scales in his favor and the gates of Paradise are opened to him and his wife (whom, the synopsis neglects to mention, he has treated like a tramp) . But he does not wish to abandon himself to heavenly bliss while there is so much misery on earth. He wishes to play the violin accompanied by the heavenly orchestra and have the earth's inhabitants hear the divine music. The merciful God grants him his wish and the celestial airs fill Heaven and earth."

What it all seemingly amounts to is an impenitent amalgam of *Faust*, *Liliom*, *The Fatal Wedding*, Howard Pyle, and the Hanlon Brothers' *Fantasma*.

The musical accompaniment, which I could understand, impressed me as fair enough. The acting, of the customary flamboyant style, appeared at least to impress the audience. The stage direction ranged from good to indifferent and bad, the handling of the crowd scenes falling into the first of the three catalogues.

Mr. Schwartz's second production, on December 20, 1945, was *Dr. Herzl*, a biographical drama of the founder of the modern Zionist movement, by two German refugees, H. R. Lenz and G. Nilioff. The action covers Herzl's crusade in various parts of the world and depicts his sacrifice of family life and personal happiness for the cause to which he devoted his days. The play marked the one hundred and twenty-seventh produced by Schwartz since he founded the Yiddish Art Theatre in 1918. Though described as somewhat verbose, it was otherwise favorably received by those of its critics who understood the language, or said they did. It enjoyed a nine weeks' run.



## POLONAISE. OCTOBER 6, 1945

*A musical Didus ineptus, book by Gottfried Reinhardt and Anthony Veiller, music by Frédéric Chopin adapted by Bronislaw Kaper, with several original numbers by latter, and lyrics by John LaTouche. Produced by W. Horace Schmidlapp in association with Harry Bloomfield for 103 performances in, initially, the Alvin Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

CAPTAIN ADAMS	John V. Schmidt	BLACKSMITH	Martin Cooke
GENERAL WASHINGTON		BUTCHER	Larry Beck
	Josef Draper	PRIEST	Larry O'Dell
COLONEL HALE	Martin Lewis	PIANIST	Zadel Skolovsky
GENERAL THADDEUS KOSCIUSKO		KING STANISLAUS AUGUSTUS	
	Jan Klepura		James MacColl
SERGEANT WACEK ZAPOLSKI		COUNT GRONSKI	Walter Appler
	Curt Bois	PRINCESS MARGARITA	Candy Jones
PRIVATE TOMPKINS	Sidney Lawson	PRINCESS LYDIA	Leta Mauree
PRIVATE SKINNER	Arthur Lincoln	PRINCESS LANIA	Sherry Shadburne
PRIVATE MOTHERWELL		PRINCESS ANNA	
	Martin Cooke		Martha Emma Watson
MARISHA	Marta Eggerth	PEASANT GIRL	Betty Durrence
WLADEK	Rem Olmsted	THE PRINCESS	Ruth Riekman
TECLA	Tania Riabouchinska	THE PRINCE	Shawn O'Brien
GENERAL BORIS VOLKOFF		THE HIGHWAYMAN	
	Harry Bannister		Sergei Ismaeloff
COUNT CASIMIR ZALESKI		THE PAGE	Amalia Valez
	Josef Draper		Jean Harris
PENIATOWSKI	Lewis Appleton	THE	Virginia Barnes
KOLLONTAJ	Andrew Thurston	BALLERINAS	Adele Bodroghy
POTOCKI	Gary Green		Joan Collette
COUNTESS LUDWIKA ZALESKI			
	Rose Inghram		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *The Ramparts—West Point—1783.* Scene 2. *The waterfront—New York.* Scene 3. *A hayfield near Cracow, Poland. (Some time later.)* Scene 4. *The road to the Manor House.* Scene 5. *The Manor House.* Scene 6. *The road to the hayfield.* Scene 7. *The hayfield—that night.* Act II. Scene 1. *The royal palace, Warsaw. (A few weeks later.)* Scene 2. *A street in Warsaw.* Scene 3. *The Battle of Maciowice.* Scene 4. *Volkoff's headquarters. After the battle.* Scene 5. *The waterfront—Philadelphia. (Some time later.)*

Director: Stella Adler.

WRITING IN the London *Sunday Times* of a musical show called *Big Boy*, the impeccable James Agate gloomily observes, "It is nothing. But then I don't expect any musical comedy to be anything. The wit? I don't look for any. The décor? A color-scheme of pear-drop pink at the point where baby has half-finished with it, a blue of sorts and Dr. Gregory's Powder does not disconcert me because I expect it. The music? Well, there is a scene in which Sir Frederick Bolsover, proprietor of Bolsover's Store, strums a tune on the piano and is astonished to find that a young lady can finish it. Why? . . . There is no acting because there couldn't be. There is a modicum of singing, and in moments of comparative silence there is a posse of loose-limbed young ladies . . ."

One can understand and sympathize with Mr. Agate's despair. It is an infrequent present-day musical — an *Okla-homa!*, a *Carousel* — which rids one of it. We usually have to be satisfied with and willing to settle for so little as a pleasant tune, a good joke, and a pretty girl. When the music is borrowed from one or another of the famous composers of the past, the situation at times is at least partly relieved. But only partly, save in the exceptional instance of a *Carmen Jones*, with Bizet's music as but one of its many excellent features. It is thus that Schubert snatchily palliates much that is commonplace and worse in a *Blossom Time*, that Grieg manages the same feat in an exhibit like *Song Of Norway*, and that Chopin faintly glosses over the bleak rest in a show like this one. On occasion, the sterility is so assertive that a Strauss can do nothing to assist a *Mr. Strauss Goes To Boston*, a Gilbert nothing to comfort a *Hollywood Pinafore*, an Offenbach little to forgive a *Helen Goes To Troy*, or a later day Kreisler nothing to atone for a *Rhapsody*.

The musical show by and large has latterly become a victim of ideational abstinence. Its old intoxication, its old boozy brio, has for the major part left it, and what remains, except in isolated cases, is an old lady over-

pinked of cheek trying to kick off a top hat with an arthritic leg.

"Chopin's home education," wrote the late James Huneker, "doubtless preserved in him a certain feminine delicacy which never deserted him." He would consequently have been a little revolted had he seen this *Polonaise*, a show which has been built, as intimated, around various of his more celebrated compositions. Employing the Polish patriot Kosciusko as a pivotal point would doubtless have been moderately satisfactory to him, and so would have been one of the ballets based on several of his themes, and so would have been the numbers severally derived from his mazurka in B-flat, etude in E, nocturne in F-sharp major, the polonaise in A-flat, and one or two others, despite not too imaginative arrangements. But one need not wonder how he would have felt had he laid eyes on the incorporation into the evening of such items as the diminutive comedian who tries to climb up a tall showgirl and who drops a medal into the bosom of her revealing décolleté, jokes about what goes on in a hay-field, a tenor who renders his delicate songs as if they were a cross between Verdi's "Anvil Chorus" and De Koven's "Brown October Ale," and a scene in the throne room of the royal palace at Warsaw wherein the King Stanislaus Augustus comports himself like the late Bert Savoy.

Nor could there be much puzzled speculation on his feelings had he further observed a scene laid on the ramparts of the West Point of 1783 in which a squad of American soldiers is put through its drill paces by a miniature refugee comedian whose triumph in Germany had been in *Charley's Aunt*; a George Washington who speaks with all the authority of a May Vokes; the ubiquitous Countess out of similar musical exhibits on end who is spurned by the hero in favor of a simple peasant maid and who humbly seeks him out with the line, "I did not come to quarrel, but to plead"; and a ballet number depicting the battle of Maciejowice whose participants toss about a Polish flag studiously agitated by off-stage electric fans.

The notion of utilizing Chopin's melodies for a later day musical show is, I suppose, perfectly legitimate, but its crit-

ical wisdom is questionable in view of the fact that they already have been so often utilized under other composers' (to misuse the word) names. Like the known surprise of audiences on finding that their most familiar sayings were first thought of by Shakespeare, it may similarly interest them to discover that the tunes of modern musical shows which they have been humming and whistling were first thought of by Chopin, but it is doubtful whether any such interest will be resolved by them into enthusiasm for the originals upon belatedly becoming acquainted with them. They very probably will remain entirely content with "I'm Always Chasing Rainbows," "My Castle Of Dreams," "Walking In The Moonlight," and the Tin Pan Alley borrowed like.

Jan Kiepura's voice is a good one, but his acting still bears a closer resemblance to a wooden barber-pole with delusions of Renaissance grandeur than to what is customarily associated with the term. Marta Eggerth is attractively modest as his peasant girl love and sings her numbers engagingly except for a coloratura passage which, as is not unusual in such cases, gives the refractory melodic impression of a slightly inebriated homosexual trying to trip up a flight of stairs. The settings by Howard Bay and the costumes by Mary Grant are elaborate and expensive but, in view of the show's materials, suggest jewelry at breakfast. While some of the girls are comely, there are a sufficient number of others whose approximate resemblance to George Sand would not, one guesses, have tickled Chopin to death either. On the whole, aside from the melodies, still another testimonial to the stupidity of so many of the newcomers into the music show producer ranks.

The producers in this case deserve some sympathy, however, for the trials they suffered at the hands of Kiepura, an actor notorious for what is known in the acting profession as temperament and in more realistic quarters by a somewhat more trenchant term. It was this Kiepura who, it may be recalled, while singing Rudolfo in *La Bohème* to the Mimi of Grace Moore at the Metropolitan, sought to distract attention from the latter and give himself the cen-

ter of the stage by covertly removing the down-stage chair in which she was to sing her aria to a position at the far upper left, and who was finally restrained only when the stagehands were ordered by the management to nail the chair to the floor. And it was this same Kiepora who drove the present management and the original director, Edward Duryea Dowling, out of their heads by insisting upon hogging attention for himself, at the expense of the others on the stage, through posing himself on haystacks and other such elevations in the settings, craftily delayed entrances, endless cheers on the part of the chorus heralding his several appearances, and similar ancient chawbacon devices.

But Kiepora's antics were and are only a drop in the bucket of 'agony that producers at one time and another have suffered from genus histrio.

When, for example, Billy Rose produced Clifford Odets' *Clash By Night*, he cast for the mechanic the dark-haired, Hebraic-featured actor, Joseph Schildkraut, on the ground that his appearance was happily suited to the role. One day during the rehearsal period he was nigh tumbled out of his seat when Schildkraut showed up with his hair dyed a brilliant red. "For the love of God," he yelled, "why that?" "I thought," calmly replied the actor, "that a mechanic should have red hair and, besides, red hair will make me more fascinating in my passionate love scenes with Tallulah Bankhead." "You get the hell right out of here to the nearest barbershop," proclaimed Rose, "and don't you come back until that tomato juice is washed off!"

The late Richard Bennett, for another example, even when he approached his upper sixties persuaded himself that the sex appeal which he had exercised so successfully years before in the days when he was a *matinée* idol was still quite as puissant as ever. In order to make doubly certain, however, it was his technique, when vague doubt overcame him, to appear on the stage at rehearsals *in puris naturalibus* save for a diaphanous white nightgown. Though the young actresses in the company managed to hold in check their giggles, lest they commit the unforgivable crime of offending the star, they often found themselves so awk-

ward in the Presence that it was all they could do to get their lines out of their mouths. The situation became so trying to the producer and the director in one instance — the play made from Jim Tully's *Jarnegan* — that they were driven to the sly expedient of leaving both the lobby and back-stage doors ajar, thereby creating such a chill draught on the stage that Bennett, fearing he might perish from pneumonia, promptly abandoned the nightgown habit and thereafter appeared sufficiently clothed against the threat of the Reaper.

Arnold Daly, that otherwise intelligent actor, was another who fancied himself irresistible to the ladies in his companies. A sufficient number of these not only failed to appreciate his charms but found that his persistent overtures seriously discommoded their acting efforts. Complaints to the managements did little good; Daly could not be dissuaded. Things came to the point where on one occasion a young actress could abide the love-making no longer and threatened to leave the company unless the management caused Daly to desist. But how to go about it? Appreciating that there was only one player on the stage at the time whose wit was cruel enough to put any other actor whom he didn't like in his place, the management told the young actress to consult him as to the best means to curb the offender. Since Wilton Lackaye was her friend, she jumped at the chance for relief. "I know Daly's amorous sexual approach well," Lackaye informed her. "It is always, 'Be nice to me, darling, and I'll teach you how to be a real actress.' The next time he springs it on you, just say to him, 'Thanks, but I prefer to select the father of my acting.'" Daly, subsequently thus crushingly talked back to for a change, winced and growled, but thereafter behaved himself — and the show went on.

Nat Goodwin's custom of making curtain speeches denouncing the critics is well known. His especial abomination among them was Alan Dale, of the New York *American*. Goodwin hated Dale with a Borgian intensity and it was a rare speech that — I quote from the records verbatim — did not run as follows:

"Critics — what a queer lot! — are generally foes to art, from Dr. Johnson down to those of the present day. Seldom sponsors, always antagonistic, jealous, and even venomous, they are eager to tear down citadels of honest thought and houses of worthy purpose. They remain hostile until the continued success of their victim compels a truce. And how cravenly they acknowledge defeat! Like the shot coyote they will only fight when wounded. But what gets on my nerves is the attention given some of these penny-a-liners [*Note.* Dale received 40,000 dollars as his annual critical wage] by the manager-producers who cull the complimentary expressions of these incompetents and print them conspicuously on their posters. To add further insult to the honest actor most of the yellow journals photograph the vermin, heading the columns of their uninformative guff with their hideous faces! Alan Dale, whose real name is Cohen, is one of this sordid crew. He called on me some years ago in Paris with firm instructions from his master, Mr. Hearst, to interview me. I sent my servant to tell him to come up and carefully arranged the furniture of my handsome suite for his reception, since I did not care to pay for breakage and I was afraid his thick skull might destroy some of the precious and costly bric-à-brac if he fell where I intended he should! I set the scene for him, but when he entered into my presence and I contemplated the little, self-opinionated, arrogant, subservient and grovelling worm, I despairingly asked myself, 'What's the use?', condescended to give him the interview, and loftily dismissed him. I felt only pity for the poor, puny, little hireling!"

This was all very well in its way, but as time went on Goodwin's management became fed up with it, since not only did it bore audiences with its endless repetition but alienated the good-will of disgusted other critics, even though personally they were not any too friendly to Dale. Meditating the situation, the management finally hit on a plan to repress their troublesome star. Goodwin, they well knew, was not averse to the flattery of young and pretty women; in point of fact, he was, in the vulgar expression, a

pushover for it. A number of such creatures, duly instructed and repaid for their trouble with free seats to the play and other gratuities, were accordingly rounded up every night to invade Goodwin's dressing-room just before he dashed into it at the play's conclusion to freshen his makeup preparatory to the oratory and to overwhelm him with their tributes to his histrionic genius and manly beauty.

It was months before he again made a speech.

The late Robert Hilliard venerated himself as a fashion-plate. It was said of him that, in preparation for a play, he would spend one hour a day in learning his part and ten at his barber's, tailor's and haberdasher's. When he paraded the boulevards, creased, pomaded, boutonnièred, begloved and becaned to within an inch of his life, even the dogs stopped to look at him, not without amusement. And no matter what the nature of a role, he insisted upon dressing it as if it had been written by the Messrs. Bell and Wetzel. This, obviously, sometimes led to dramatic embarrassment, and in the case of the play called *A Fool There Was*, based upon the familiar Kipling verses, also to considerable ribaldry among the critics and members of the audience. It led to dramatic embarrassment because audience sympathy was difficultly to be achieved for a character who went the grim road to ruin as immaculately and unruffledly wardrobed as if he were esconced in an opera box. And it led to ribaldry because Hilliard's extreme sartorial polish waywardly reminded the critics and audience of a certain obscene simile popular in that day.

There was one scene in particular in the play with which Hilliard's finery played havoc. Whereas he should properly have played it in a casual business suit, he insisted upon appearing in it—and making it ridiculous—in an outfit more appropriate to the Royal Enclosure at Ascot. To the pleas of the producer, Fred Thompson, he however remained adamant. Exasperated, Thompson thereupon got busy. Getting hold of an eighteen dollar two-pairs-of-pants-to-the-suit tailor on Eighth Avenue, he had him confect a burlesque replica of the outfit, amplified by a boutonnière the size of a small cabbage. He then hired a very black



Negro to embellish himself with it and to sit down front for several successive performances where Hilliard's eye could not miss him. On the fourth night Hilliard appeared in another suit, though he declined to speak to Thompson for weeks afterward.

A few seasons ago, Eddie Dowling had a similar sartorial adventure with a young actor named Barker, who since has found his art more relevant to Hollywood and the cinema. Cast for the role of Morris Carleon in a revival of Chesterton's *Magic*, Barker, a pretty fellow, insisted upon augmenting his pulchritude by dressing himself up not in the easy and fairly slouchy manner appropriate to the character but in duds splendiferous enough to equip a pair of John Drews. Even the raincoat which the play's meteorological conditions at one point imposed upon him must, he affirmed, be not damp and rumpled but dry and nobby. "I cannot act in clothes that are not smart in every respect," he asserted.

As in the earlier case of Thompson, Dowling's protestations were to no avail, and those scenes in the play in which the young actor figured got nowhere with the snickering audience. One night, accordingly, the producer went into action. Getting to the theatre early, he slipped into the actor's dressing-room before he arrived, took his clothes off the hooks, carefully piled them on a chair, for the next fifteen minutes sat on them with a ceaselessly agitated backside, and mussed them into something remotely approaching human apparel. He also poured a few glasses of water from the dressing-room basin on the raincoat. And the scenes for at least one performance — the actor showed up for the next as scrupulously moded as ever — had some effect.

By way of a brighter note, no one ever had any such trouble with John Barrymore, at any rate in the days when the handsome dog was known as Jack. Jack cared less about his clothes than any actor since Molière's wagon days. It is related of him that he at one time wore the same suit, along with the same underwear, for so unduly protracted a stretch that his loving and solicitous sister Ethel was mercifully

constrained one night to sneak into his room, steal it, and have it burned. And it is further related, though the story may well be apocryphal, that, when he was playing in *A Stubborn Cinderella* with Sally Fisher, Sally nightly had to load up on garlic for reasons that politely need not be suggested. Yet the romantic memory of Jack lives on, while the perfumed clothes-horses are forgotten.

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 THÉRÈSE. OCTOBER 9, 1945

*A drama by Thomas Job based on the novel, Thérèse Raquin, by Émile Zola. Produced by Victor Payne-Jennings and Bernard Klawans for 96 performances in the Biltmore Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

CAMILLE	Berry Kroeger	MADAME LOUISE	Doris Patston
MADAME RAQUIN		MR. GRIVET	John F. Hamilton
	Dame May Whitty	INSPECTOR MICHAUD	Averell Harris
THÉRÈSE	Eva Le Gallienne	SUZANNE	Annette Sorell
LAURENT	Victor Jory		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. A Thursday evening in spring. Scene 2. The following Sunday evening. Act II. Scene 1. Evening. About one year later. Scene 2. A few months later.

*The action of the play takes place in a living-room above a milliner's shop in the Pont Neuf district in Paris. 1875-1876.*

Director: Margaret Webster.

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THERE IS no good reason why Zola's novel should not even at this late date once again be dramatized, except perhaps the academically uncritical one that its story has become somewhat too familiar and frayed with the years. Equally familiar and not altogether unfayed stories still seem to be successful enough on the current stage, as one need hardly point out. But there is a good critical reason in the argument that, if it be redramatized, the dramatist should be considerably more expert than the Thomas Job who is responsible for the exhibit here considered. If, as in this case, only the obvious melodramatic aspects of the novel are made use of and the deeper elements of character largely neglected, it might just as well have sufficed to forget Zola and to offer in his stead one of the canned goods of more recent vintage in which murder is similarly done to romantic ends and in which conscience, exercising its inexorable will, similarly contrives to drive the culprit or culprits to confess to the crime.

The present dramatization bears all the marks of an ordered job undertaken to provide a vehicle for Miss Le Gallienne and her co-stars, Victor Jory and Dame May Whitty, but especially Miss Le Gallienne. In this respect, it harks back to the yesterdays of our theatre when such commissions were a common practise and when the stage often resembled less a section of a playhouse than the stock-room of the *Modern Library*. Those were the days when Mrs. Fiske, Virginia Harned, Henry Miller, Amelia Bingham, and other name actors set their carpenters, and even their plumbers, to work on Dumas, Tolstoi, Thackeray, Prévost, Daudet, Dickens, Hardy, *et al.*, and when dozens of such stage contraptions as *Becky Sharp*, *The Only Way*, *Anna Karenina*, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, *Olympe*, and *Manon Lescaut* brought audiences seriously to doubt the genius of their hitherto esteemed sources. Those were the days, in short, when our theatre was a stable for vehicles instead of a possible home for original and reputable drama.

Zola's own dramatization of his novel was defined in purpose by him "to take a strong man and an unsatisfied woman, to seek in them the beast, to see nothing but the beast, to throw them into a violent drama, and to note scrupulously the sensations and 'acts of these creatures.'" His achievement, he declared, was that "I have simply done on two living bodies the work which surgeons do on corpses." Mr. Job has not omitted the violent drama but his noting of the sensations and acts of the protagonists substitutes for scrupulosity the mere hokums of greasepaint histrionism. And what he has done on the erstwhile two living bodies has been rather the work which the old-time writers of peanut screamers did on plot corpses. *O Zola mio*.

The acting, except for a thoroughly professional performance of Madame Raquin by Dame Whitty, was far from noteworthy. Miss Le Gallienne was fair enough in the tough-fibred later stretches of the play but acted the earlier romantic passages almost wholly with her facial muscles. Victor Jory committed not only the murder indicated in the script but added another for good measure, that of the

King's English. The others were strictly routine. Margaret Webster's direction, appreciating the general superficiality of the dramatization, tried vainly to conceal it by adjusting the leading characters in spuriously profound postures and by replacing psychological agitation with physical movement. Raymond Sovey's setting and costumes supplied a measure of the French atmosphere which was nowhere else perceptible in the proceedings.

The presentation in its entirety, with its preservation of such seasoned lines as "You are like fire in my blood, like poison; every nerve in my body quivers to you," converted the celebrated novel into an 1890 yellow-back acted by Bertha M. Clays and Charles Garvices grandiosely operating under the delusion that they were relatives of Zola.

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 THE RED MILL. OCTOBER 16, 1945

*A musical comedy by Henry Blossom and Victor Herbert, with book edited by Milton Lazarus. Revived by Paula Stone and Hunt Stromberg, Jr., for a run of the season in, originally, the Ziegfeld Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

TOWN CRIER	Billy Griffith	GRETCHEN	Ann Andre
WILLEM	Hal Price	CAPT. HENDRIK VAN DAMN	
FRANZ	George Meader		Robert Hughes
TINA	Dorothy Stone	GASTON	Charles Collins
BILL-POSTER	Tom Halligan	MADAME LA FLEUR	Odette Myrtil
FLORA	Hope O'Brady	GEORGETTE	Phylliss Bateman
LENA	Lois Potter	SUZETTE	Nony Franklin
DORA	Mardi Bayne	FLEURETTE	Kathleen Ellis
THE BURGEMEESTER	Frank Jaquet	NANETTE	Jacqueline Ellis
A SAILOR	Thomas Spengler	LUCETTE	Patricia Gardner
JULIANA	Lorna Byron	YVETTE	Joan Johnston
CON KIDDER	Michael O'Shea	THE GOVERNOR	Edward Dew
KID CONNER	Eddie Foy, Jr.		

SYNOPSIS: Time. About 1900. Place. Katwkyann-Zee, Holland.  
 Act I. *The Inn at the Red Mill.* Act II. Scene 1. *A neighborhood street.*  
 Scene 2. *Home of the Burgemeester.*

Director: Billy Gilbert.

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TRAVELING in the hinterland some summers ago, I found myself one night in an Elks' hall, up two flights, where the brothers, their wives, and their offspring were performing their conception of *The Merry Widow*. When it was over, the owner of the local five-room hotel, whom I had had the honor of meeting at his three-foot bar that afternoon, came up to me and grunted, "Tell me something, buddy; is this that show all you critics down there in New York said was so good? You're nuts!"

Our friend might have felt the same way had he deposited eyes on this revival of *The Red Mill*.

*The Red Mill*, true enough, is no *Merry Widow*, not by a thousand leagues. But what they have currently done to

it is, in the lingo of its era, a caution. Its performers are for the most part relatives of the aforesaid Elks; its settings and costumes are strictly Moose; its lighting has evidently been devised by someone previously identified with the Niles, Ohio, Electric Illuminating Company; and its stage direction follows the green-light-go, red-light-stop pattern.

Anyone who saw the show years ago when Charlie Dillingham put it on at the old Knickerbocker Theatre would hardly recognize it. Charlie, who had not only the Goelet fortune but the Klaw and Erlanger money at his command, but who also had taste, did the thing up brown. I still from distant youth remember that beautiful Holland-scened stage bursting with tulips; and that diamond-brilliant lighting melting into soft blue, which in those days of makeshift stage illumination brought surprised oh's and ah's; and those gay costumes that, as with Ziegfeld later on, seemed just to have emerged from a bandbox; and those lovely girls like Connie Eastman and Paula Desmond and Fay Hengler; and Victor Herbert himself, aglow with Pilsner, in the orchestra pit; and all the rest. It was far from a pre-eminent show, but it certainly was a very attractive and very pleasing one.

Yet here is the pulp twist. Though almost everything one can think of is wrong with it in its present incarnation — including a mill that doesn't work, a young comedian who can't swing aloft on it the way even seventy-odd-year-old Fred Stone, who was present originally, doubtless still could, and Odette Myrtil with, the gods forbid, her violin — it was nevertheless the best musical show thus far in the season.

For all its forty year age, compare it with some of these hereinbefore reviewed 1945 specimens. While its book may be simply an artless tangle of innocent love stories, it is yet something of a relief from the pretentious pseudo-historical chutneys that have smeared the current stages, and Herbert's score remains a delight. Reflect contrariwise on a *Marinka* with its preposterous Mayerling stuff set to Kalman's tunes that were already moth-eaten when he dug them out of the false-bottom of his trunk. Or on a *Mr. Strauss*

*Goes To Boston* with its rubber-stamp composer character wobbling between two rubber-stamp loves and set largely to incorporated Straussless music which sounded like a bad copy of the deceased Ludwig Englander at his worst. Or with a *Carib Song* and its flightless rehash of the *Porgy And Bess* triangle orchestrated to what seemed rhythmically to be a single melody, and that one old-hat for years to customers of Havana's Sloppy Joe's and Nassau's Dirty Dick's. Or with a *Polonaise* (best to be criticized by putting an *i* after the *l*) which, in addition to howling botched Chopin melodies, excavated the 1880 triangle of the hero amorously entangled with the rich lady of title but finding his heart wandering to the poor peasant girl.

If maybe not to Harry Blossom, to Victor belong the spoils. I do not, certainly, mean to reflect upon Johann and Frédéric. They are, of course, all right, and very considerably more than that, in their places. But their places are hardly in the hands of ostentatious arrangers who arrange them out of all recognition and then put them into shows in which they are impersonated by actors who look like Harry Von Tilzer or in which their delicate songs are rendered by oxyphonic tenors. Whatever else is manhandled in *The Red Mill*, they have at least, save for the deletion of three numbers: "Good-a-Bye, John," "A Widow Has Ways," and "You Can Never Tell About A Woman," left Herbert pretty well alone. (The incorporation of "Al Fresco" from his *It Happened In Nordland*, of "Punchinello" and "Badinage," and of one of his piano sketches for the ballet music will surely offend no one.) And, once again, and accordingly, "Isle Of Dreams," "In Old New York," "When You're Pretty And The World Is Fair," "Every Day Is Ladies' Day With Me," "Because You're You," "I Want You To Marry Me," and the other tunes in a remarkably tuneful show set memory a-humming.

Up until this season, whenever things have not looked too bright in the contemporary playhouse, there has always been one sugar-coated pill that the critics, for the most part younger men, have fallen back upon to sustain their optimism. It has contained the philosophy that, whatever else



might be lacking in the stage, its musical shows indicated a great advance over those of long past years and that they remained at least one fine, new white mark to the credit of the American theatre. I myself, now gray with the passing of time, in an unthinking moment once similarly swallowed the pill and exercised its consequences on paper, apparently to the pleasant conviction and satisfaction of my constituency. I apologize. It might be advantageous if critics, myself included, stopped to reflect once in a while, for a change.

That there have been some very good shows in the past few seasons no one for a moment will deny. Outstanding have been such as *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel*, and *Carmen Jones*. The melodies of Rodgers and the lyrics of Hammerstein established the first two as deserved successes, and the musical arrangements of Russell Bennett and, again, the lyrics of Hammerstein, the current top man in his field, did the same in the case of the third. The music of the third, however, was the music of Bizet, and the books of all three were admittedly derivative. *Oklahoma!* stemmed from Lynn Riggs' play, *Green Grow The Lilacs*, and was hailed with enthusiasm as a notable contribution to musical Americana, which was a bit confounding in view of the fact that *Green Grow The Lilacs*, when displayed years before, got only an indifferent reception whether as Americana or anything else. *Carousel* was simply Molnár's familiar *Liliom* transposed not a little implausibly to a New England setting. And *Carmen Jones*, as everyone also knows, was the libretto of the opera, *Carmen*, skilfully adapted to Negro purposes. All three were worthy shows, the last named especially and particularly so, but the eminence of at least the first two was due in considerable part to the reason enunciated by J. S. Mill.

Aside from this trio, the new shows of the last three seasons most highly regarded by the critics were the following:

*Something For The Boys*, book by Herbert and Dorothy Fields, music and lyrics by Cole Porter.

*One Touch Of Venus*, book and lyrics by S. J. Perelman and Ogden Nash, music by Kurt Weill.

*Mexican Hayride*, book by Herbert and Dorothy Fields, music and lyrics by Cole Porter.

*Song Of Norway*, book by Milton Lazarus, music by Grieg, adapted by Robert Wright and George Forrest and lyrics by same.

*On The Town*, book and lyrics by Betty Comden and Adolph Green, music by Leonard Bernstein.

*Bloomer Girl*, book by Sig Herzig and Fred Saidy, lyrics by E. Y. Harburg, music by Harold Arlen.

Nothing further up to this moment had received their endorsement.

This, then, was the recent record.

Let us go back to the three seasons of forty and more years ago and see what was on tap then.

In the season of 1902-1903, the stage had on it such shows as *The Defender*, *The Emerald Isle* with music by Sir Arthur Sullivan, *A Country Girl* with the Lionel Monckton score, *The Silver Slipper* with the Leslie Stuart score, *The Mocking Bird* with A. Baldwin Sloane's music, Julian Edwards' and Stanislaus Stange's *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*, the Kerker-Smith *The Billionaire*, George Ade's celebrated *The Sultan Of Sulu*, the spectacular *Mr. Bluebeard*, the unforgotten *The Wizard Of Oz*, Marie Cahill's droll vehicle, *Nancy Brown*, the Negro show, *In Dahomey*, with lyrics by Paul Laurence Dunbar and music by Marion Cook, the melodious *The Prince Of Pilsen* by Pixley and Luders, George M. Cohan's early appearance in his *Running For Office*, and the well-recalled *The Runaways*.

Who for an instant would compare *Something For The Boys* with *The Sultan Of Sulu*, *One Touch Of Venus* with *The Prince Of Pilsen*, *Mexican Hayride* with *The Wizard Of Oz*, *On The Town* with *A Country Girl*, or *Bloomer Girl* with *The Runaways*? Or *Song Of Norway*, aside from the borrowed Grieg music, with the books and lyrics of any three other of the earlier shows?

In the 1903-1904 season, there were such exhibits as Paul Rubens' *Three Little Maids*, George Ade's *Peggy From Paris*, *The Jersey Lily*, to which Reginald De Koven contributed music, Victor Herbert's celebrated *Babes In Toyland*, Ivan Caryll's *The Girl From Kay's*, the operatic *The Red Feather* with De Koven's score, Victor Herbert's *Babette*, Gus Kerker's *Winsome Winnie*, Richard Carle's *The Tenderfoot*, the delightful Blossom-Robyn *The Yankee Consul*, and the Offenbach revue, *A Little Bit Of Everything*.

I think I will hardly be accused of stacking the critical cards in comparing Offenbach, Victor Herbert, De Koven or Rubens with Richard Rodgers in the case of either *Oklahoma!* or *Carousel*. Or *Babes In Toyland*, *The Red Feather*, or *The Yankee Consul* with a sufficient number of the other recent shows approved by those critics who believe in the tremendous advance of the American musical stage, both in the way of native and imported talent.

Finally, the season of 1904-1905 and such shows as *The School Girl*, *A Madcap Princess*, George Ade's famous *The Sho-Gun* with the Luders score, George Cohan's *Little Johnny Jones*, the excellent Pixley-Luders *Woodland* and Victor Herbert's *It Happened In Nordland*, the musical version of *The School For Scandal* under the title *Lady Teazle*, the gay *Fantana* (remember Julia Sanderson?), and the tuneful light opera, *The Duchess Of Dantzic*.

What original American show of late seasons is better than *Woodland*, *It Happened In Nordland*, or *The Sho-Gun*? I leave the attempt at a convincing answer to the reader.

Jump far back over the years and further compare most of the later day domestic or imported shows to their great advantage with such as *The Arcadians*, *The Casino Girl*, *San Toy*, *The Geisha*, *Florodora*, *The Burgomaster*, George Ade's *The Night Of The Fourth*, *The Strollers*, *The Messenger Boy*, *The Liberty Belles*, De Koven's *Maid Marian* and *The Little Duchess*, *Sleeping Beauty And The Beast*, *The Toreador*, *Havana*, *The Wild Rose*, *The Merry Widow*, the Pixley-Luders *King Dodo*, the various Victor

Herbert shows including this *The Red Mill*, *A Chinese Honeymoon*, *The Dollar Princess*, *The Waltz Dream*, and a score and more of others. And where on the stage of recent seasons has there been a purely American show superior to such shows of times this side of ancient history as *Show Boat*, *Music In The Air*, and *Porgy And Bess*, which have to be revived to lend quality and bounce to the contemporary musical scene?

Without the slightest suggestion of crying into my beer, I should like to have those critics who have celebrated the progress of our musical stage tell me if they think that the later Shubert editions of the *Ziegfeld Follies* compare in any respect with Ziegfeld's own. I should also like to have them tell me if there are any new American composers superior to De Koven, Herbert, Kern, Luders, *et al.* And I should further like to have them persuade me that Ade's pure Americana was inferior to Hammerstein's adapted Riggs and Molnár Americana in *Oklahoma!* and *Carousel*. And, while they are about it, I should like to have them inform me how the use of the music of such composers as Chopin, Schubert, Grieg, Tchaikowski, Bizet, Strauss and others operates toward the higher original estate of our native musical stage.

I do not argue that everything was gold and honey in other days and that nothing is gold and honey in these. Not by any means. What I say is simply that this theory of the remarkable advance of our musical stage is what the vulgar, both in and out of Congress, describe as boloney. A *tour de force* like *Carmen Jones*, admirable in every way, may come along and deceive the injudicious, but the general run of shows is not only not any better but more often considerably poorer than the general run in years now far distant. Settings and costumes may on occasion be prettier and more tasteful, but they provide, with an occasional lyric, the only exceptions. The books and the scores, the performers and even the looks of the girls do not indicate anything to induce envy in graves now cold.

I report at first hand and not guessing from the records. I further report facts undiluted with any sentimentality or

anything resembling nostalgia, that arthritis of the mind. You may, if you are still in the tender years, believe me — or you may not and impatiently tell me where I can go. But if it is hell to which you consign me, I ask you while I am on the way down to grant my contention at least half an inch by forgetting the better shows past and recent for a few moments, centering your attention on the second- and third-grade instead, and accepting my word for it that *Up In Central Park* was not one-tenth so humorous as the forty-five-year-old *The Rogers Brothers In Central Park*, that *Star and Garter* of a few seasons ago was not any great improvement over *Star and Garter* produced by Frank McKee also forty-five years ago, that *Abyssinia*, produced a few years later in 1906 with Bert Williams heading the cast, was quite as amusing as some of the Abyssinian revues put on more recently, and that *About Town* of that same year had much the same "original" idea as the recently venerated *On The Town*.

Our later day American musical stage, let the optimistic remember, turns up a half dozen *Mr. Strauss Goes To Boston*, a half dozen *Firebrands Of Florence*, and a half dozen other such duds for every show of any merit. The average was a lot better in the remote yesterdays.

## THE ASSASSIN. OCTOBER 17, 1945

*A melodrama by Irwin Shaw. Produced by Carly Wharton and Martin Gable in association with Alfred Bloomingdale for 13 performances in the National Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

MONSIEUR POPINOT		GENERAL KLEY	Robert Ober
	William Hansen	COLONEL VON KOEL	
GUSTAV BOUBARD	Alfred White		William Malten
LUCIEN GERARD	Guy Sorel	ADMIRAL MARCEL VESPERY	
CHRISTINE THEODORE			Roger De Koven
	Frances Chaney	HAYNES	Harrison Dowd
CHARLES GANNERAC		A CAPTAIN	Alan Dreeben
	Ralph Stantley	LIEUTENANT CRANE	Stuart Nedd
HELENE MARIOTTE	Lesley Woods	SERGEANT	Frank DeLangton
SOPHIE VAUQUIN	Elena Karam	A LIEUTENANT	Bill Weyse
ROBERT DE MAUNY		MONSIEUR JACQUES	Booth Colman
	Frank Sundstrom	A WOMAN	Florence Robinson
VICTOR MALLASIS	Harold Huber	GUARD	Alan Dreeben
DAVID STEIN	Henry Sharp	PRIEST	William Marceau
IDA STEIN	Carmen Mathews		Booth Colman
ANDRE VAUQUIN	Karl Malden		Ralph Smiley
STEINGEL	Peter Gregg	SOLDIERS	Bill Weyse
GENERAL ROUCHEAU	Richard Keith		William Marceau
GENERAL MOUSSET	Clay Clement		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. A café in Algiers. Evening, early in November, 1942. Scene 2. A room in French Army Headquarters. Later that night. Scene 3. The café. Evening, a few days later. Act II. Scene 1. The room at headquarters. Scene 2. A small villa outside Algiers. Scene 3. The café. Christmas Eve. Act III. Scene 1. The café. Ten minutes later. Scene 2. A cell in a military jail. Just before dawn, the next morning.

Director: Martin Gabel.

IT IS THE AUTHOR'S theory that Admiral Darlan's assassination was engineered by a French general hostile to him and who employed as his tool a young French royalist. This latter, who had been lodged in a concentration camp along with the Free French, was spirited out of it by the general and persuaded to undertake the killing upon the latter's

promise to release his comrades from confinement and, further, to see to it that a substitute would be maneuvered into his place before the firing squad. After the young man had shot Darlan, he learned that, because others than the general were now in power, no substitute would be available and, preferring death to betraying the general, went to his doom. The melodrama brewed from the theory is a fairly lively one up to the last of its eight scenes. That scene is the antiquated one in the prison cell with the hero awaiting the hour of his execution and involving the usual farewell of the lovers. It has been repeated on the stage so often that its juice went out of it at least forty years ago. If Shaw had omitted it and had brought down his final curtain on the shot heard over the radio — the shot that ended the life of Darlan — the evening would have managed a much better impression.

While the play deals with the events leading up to the assassination of the French opportunist in Algiers, it seems to me to enjoy a measure of inner life quite apart from its historical aspect, which may be a bit too much of yesterday to retain theatrical vivacity. Avoiding, or at least concealing, that personal indignation which so frequently turns serious melodrama childish, Shaw contrives to make his auditor feel indignation for himself without feeling it for him. Too many playwrights lecture indignation at their customers. Shaw, though he unquestionably feels hot under the collar, is sagacious enough not to let them detect the perspiration. As a consequence, his exhibit, though no one will argue that it hasn't its many faults, periodically achieves a nice emotional reaction.

I observed that some of the reviewers, in their general fierce condemnation of the play, objected to its love story — involving the hero and a girl of the French underground — as being too impromptu and sketchy and obviously incorporated under the author's belief in its theatrical necessity. There may have been some merit in the latter criticism, but not, I believe, in the former. The circumstance that the story is handled elliptically is all in its favor. Love, though the aforesaid gentlemen appear from too pro-

tracted theatrical experience to imagine otherwise, is not always conducted after the technique of a Sardou or Clifford Odets. At least not sudden romantic love. It is — so I have been informed by reliable authorities of both sexes — just as often lacking in drama as the sprouting of a field clover, and just as fragrant.

Theatrical habit sometimes plays havoc with criticism. Critics may stoutly deny that they occasionally have been led to judge life in terms of dramatic routine, but give them something a little different emotionally, something that does not quite fit into the pattern of stage acceptance, and they have trouble in reconciling it with worldly reality. It is thus that two admirable, but strange to them, episodes in *Outrageous Fortune*, for only one example, drew the stings of their arrows.

It is the mark of much modern criticism hence loftily to derogate and deprecate any degree of sentiment in drama, to look upon it as somewhat effeminate, and to venerate instead what is called, often factitiously, the realistic approach. That sentiment is realism, critically speaking, in the relations of many men and women is overlooked and endorsement withheld instead for a bogus species of realism wholly alien to the emotions of the characters dealt with. This is not, as so many maintain, a hard-boiled age. It is not the age that is hard-boiled so much as it is some of its affectedly hard-boiled critics. Sentiment has produced some of the most truthful and realistic plays written in our time. They range all the way from O'Neill's *Strange Interlude* to Brieux's *The Incubus*, from O'Casey's *The Plough And The Stars* to Schnitzler's *Anatol*, and from Echegaray's *The Great Galeoto* to, at the extreme, even some such comedy as *Cynara*. There remains a much greater essential realism in a sentimental play like Porto-Riche's *L'Amoureuse* than in a dozen supposedly realistic ones like *Women Go On Forever*.

Though the writing of *The Assassin* is of an uneven quality and though there is occasional descent to such stencils as "I think if there's any hope in the world it's in people like you" and such toy monocle stuff as "The Americans are very



inconsiderate about their invasions; they invade at such unfashionable hours," the melodrama enjoyed some theatrical interest and hardly deserved the quick death meted out to it by the same critics who were enthusiastic about that other and not so good melodrama, *Deep Are The Roots*. The acting, save for Frank Sundstrom, a Swede imported for the title role, who read his lines — perhaps because of unfamiliarity with the English language — as if he were simultaneously trying to dislodge a grapeskin from the roof of his mouth and a caraway seed from one of his left molars, was thoroughly in key with the play. And Martin Gabel's stage direction was first-rate, as were Boris Aronson's settings.

No one who has read Shaw's *Sailor Off The Bremen* can doubt his knack for melodrama; but no one who listened in *The Assassin* to his extended speeches on "men of quality" and to his resort to the device of glossing over their length with an apologetic joke can doubt in turn that he still needs the experience in the theatre that he has had in the short story.

There has been an idea, favored in many quarters, that men returned from the late wars would prove to be a mine of dramatic gold and that out of them would come plays that must bedizen our stage no end. I dislike to be a skeleton at the feast — even an imaginary feast — but, as much as I should like to believe it, I fear that the idea is simply father to the wish, and that father on this occasion has been hitting the bottle rather harder than usual. Back of the idea is the apparent belief that the wars, both western and eastern, will have provided an experience so rich in emotional reward, so opulent in knowledge of strange lands and strange peoples, and generally so contributive to political, sociological, and other cosmic understanding that choice masterpieces can not fail to be the result. Maybe, but again your obnoxious skeleton, bearing a deplorable resemblance to Frank Libuse, trips up the waiters and spills the string beans.

It is admittedly still too early to tell whether things will turn out differently, but the few plays to date written by actual fighting servicemen which have seen production have

been far from encouraging. *The Wind Is Ninety*, as hereinbefore noted, was little more than a penniless revamping of *The Return of Peter Grimm* of thirty-odd years ago, of *Thunder In The Air* of sixteen ago, and of *But Not Good-bye* of several seasons ago. Preceding it, we had the five short plays grouped under the heading, *The Army Play-By-Play*, none of which offered anything to arouse any great critical enthusiasm. All save one were compounded of obvious melodrama, valentine sentimentality, and vaudeville humor. The exception purveyed several touches of good sardonic observation but was otherwise similarly without any true dramatic quality.

These up to this chapter have been the only simon-pure servicemen fruits. That is, plays from the hands of men in one or another branch of the armed services who had not before been playwrights by profession. And even the latter who have gone into uniform have failed to indicate that the wars have especially stimulated their talents. A Laurence Stallings has produced nothing but an inferior mixture of realism and symbolism in *The Streets Are Guarded*; an Irwin Shaw nothing but a poor exercise in Belasco sentiment in *Sons And Soldiers*, and in this *The Assassin* a critically only passable exercise in melodrama; and a John Patrick little more in *The Hasty Heart* than a box-office character study of a Scots soldier which, so far as the wars were concerned, might quite as truthfully have been written about characters in civilian life.

At this point, a voice sarcastically demands what about *A Bell For Adano*? *A Bell For Adano*, the voice should not need to be reminded, is the dramatization by an experienced civilian playwright of a novel not by a man in arms but by a correspondent. It is possible that some meritorious plays may come from correspondents and from others who were removed from the scenes of actual conflict, but it is of the soldiery that we are specifically speaking. Apart from the possibility in the case of these correspondents and the others it looks — if past records count for anything — that when and if any commendable war plays appear they probably will be written not by the men who served on the bat-

tlefields, on the seas and in the skies but for the most part by those who, because of age or for other perfectly justifiable reasons, were condemned to remain in mufti. Certainly the even only relatively better war plays that we have had in the several past seasons have been those by such civilian playwrights as Sherwood in the case of *There Shall Be No Night*, Anderson in the case of *The Eve Of St. Mark*, James in *Winter Soldiers*, Hellman in *Watch On The Rhine*, and Behrman and Werfel in *Jacobowsky And The Colonel*. In another quarter, even the two big Army and Air shows were the products of Berlin and Hart respectively, neither of them members of the armed forces.

The truth seems to be that, in this country at least, wars appear to have been remiss in inspiring dramatic talent. All that the War of the Revolution gave birth to were items like Brackenridge's *The Battle Of Bunker's-Hill*, Dunlap's *André*, and Leacock's *The Fall Of British Tyranny*, none of them of any account save as curios. The War of 1812 was followed in turn chiefly by Richard Penn Smith's *The Triumph Of Plattsburg* and Mordecai Noah's *She Would Be A Soldier, or The Plains Of Chippewa*, of which the same criticism holds. The Civil War was followed — and at a long distance — by the Bronson Howard *Shenandoah* species of ten-twenty-thirty melodrama dressed up for the carriage trade and, later still, by the Gillette *Held By The Enemy* and *Secret Service* species which, while good theatre, hardly fell under the heading of important drama. And the Spanish-American War produced nothing but one or two melodramas that were out-and-out ten-twenty-thirtys and whose appeal was solely to the culture which demands that drama be accompanied by peanuts. Coming to more recent times, the only play of any quality emanating from World War I was *What Price Glory?*, and that play, to return to our immediate thesis, while the inspiration of a man who had seen action on the battlefield was the dramaturgical work of another who was a playwright of experience. For the rest, what plays appeared were not worth the powder to dust their noses.

The majority of the boys who, having served in one ca-

capacity or another in the European and Pacific wars, will turn to playwriting will, it is safe to venture, attempt, like Shaw, seriously to philosophize their experiences and will find that, for all their first-hand knowledge, their cerebrations will not get them as far dramatically as those who have meditated remote from the fields of battle and at second-hand. It is that way, often, with wars as with other phases of life.

But there is another path open to them. The pages of *Yank*, the drawings of Bill Mauldin, the shows put on privately by them all have indicated that what they may lack in a serious direction they possess in a humorous. If they will employ these humorous talents and exercise them upon their experiences plays of some spice and fruit may result. *The Good Soldier Schweik*, which came out of Central Europe from World War I, was worth three-fourths of all the serious war plays that came from the same quarter. War, true enough, is not a funny business, but neither, particularly, is life. Yet in both there are rebellious moments of comedy and it is these moments that in the past have been and still may be turned to rich and valuable dramatic account.

## SEVEN MIRRORS. OCTOBER 25, 1945

*A play devised by students in the Immaculate Heart College of Los Angeles, California, and edited by Emmet Lavery. Produced by the Blackfriars' Guild for 23 performances in the Blackfriars' Theatre.*

## CAST

Carol Gustafson, Helen Horton, Barclay Stevens, Peggy Ann McCay, Rita Heffernan, Elsbeth Fuller, Joyce Ingig, Margaret Itter, Mary Talas, Elizabeth Ryan, Beatrice Adams, Gladys Moldoff, Dena Desta, Pepa Kantor, Margaret Linse, Jack Sherry, Norma Keohane, William Bock, Geraldine Page, Zoe Winkler, Gwenda Talens, Linda Lee, Dennis P. Harrison, Shepherd D. Roberts, John D. Barry, Jonathan O'Connor, Ray Mahaffie, Jeanne Williams, David Kaplan, Grace Ross, Angelita Reynosa, Leo Herbert, Edward Steinmetz, Charlotte Kogan, Dorothy Kimball, Ann Rogers, Harriet Welch, Dorothy Brown, Kathleen Arnold, Pat Neal, Gladys Collins, Erji Claire, Ross Steadman.

Director: *Dennis Gurney.*

**D**ESIGNATED AS "an experiment in social drama," the exhibit consists in a prologue, seven scenes, and an epilogue, utilizing magic lantern slides in lieu of scenery, a choir, choreography, music through a public address system, and forty-odd actors. The action is continuous and without intermissions. What emanates from the mishmash, which has been faultily patterned after similar experiments in the pre-war German theatre, is everything but drama.

The idea which the confusion seeks to merchant is that the world's future rests in "the brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God" and that it is woman, the mother of mankind, who must bring it into being. This idea is translated through seven variations of the Holy Mary purportedly indicating how women may assist man's activities. The first scene is laid in Warsaw and depicts women beating up the Nazi enemy. The second is laid in an American college and argues that women should join the armed forces instead of lolling at their ease at home. The third, on Leyte,

peculiarly devotes itself to a soldier preferring death to native blood plasma that might save his life. The fourth, laid in Mexico, proves that even a radical may have a heart of gold despite defiance of the Church. The fifth, in Lourdes, shows the late Franz Werfel's conversion to the Faith. The sixth, a scene on a New York bus, is devoted to women's gossip on sundry thematic topics. And the seventh and last, in Berlin, argues that the women of defeated Germany should not kill friendly American troops. The whole, when it is not ridiculously melodramatic, is ridden by sentimentality and, overall, is thoroughly amateurish. Sincerity and honesty of purpose are undeniably present, but sincerity and honesty of purpose have a hard time getting on in the theatre, or for that matter anywhere else, without at least a modicum of ability.

The occasion must once again surely discomfit those souls in our midst who are forever deploring the commercialism of our theatre and dreaming poppy dreams of the wonderful potentialities of the free and independent little experimental groups, since it is to be feared that any comparison of the respective later accomplishments of the former with the latter in this, the theatrical capital of the nation, is perceptibly in favor of the theatre which they disparage.

In the previous year, these experimental groups produced eleven plays. Of the eleven, nine were the work of Americans, one that of a Mexican, and one the product of the late young Spanish poet, Federico Garcia Lorca. The American exhibits were *Anna Lucasta*, *Don't George!*, *Walk Hard, Home Is The Hero*, *Garden Of Time*, *Simon's Wife*, *Korb'n*, *Tomorrow's Yesterday*, and *Slice It Thin!* The Mexican play was *Quintin Quintana*. The Lorca play was *If Five Years Pass*. Take a reflective glance at them.

*Anna Lucasta*, which was subsequently brought down from the American Negro Theatre into the Broadway commercial theatre — and for a significantly prosperous box-office run — was essentially, almost any way one looked at it, commercial rather than experimental goods. Originally a play dealing with Poles, it was transformed into one about Negroes, a process which to the critical mind would seem

largely akin to transforming *Run, Little Chillun* in turn into a play about the former. That aside, however, it amounted to not much more than the old sentimental show-shop goods about the prostitute who longs for a better life and the shadow of whose past darkens her hope. What virtue the presentation had rested mainly in its acting by a very able Negro company, but it is drama, not acting, on which the commercial theatre detractors have their minds, and even they do not argue that the commercial theatre's acting isn't satisfactory to them.

The other two offerings of the Negro Theatre were *Walk Hard* and *Garden Of Time*. The former was a lame play about a colored prize-fighter who battles race prejudice on his way to ring triumph and, though its theme was a valid one, proved only and once again that a basic knowledge of dramaturgy is as desirable on the experimental stage as on the commercial. The latter was a paraphrase of the Jason legend, far beyond its author's competences, and amounted not only to heavy pretension, but to the kind of thing that the commercial theatre — say what you will against it, and that is sometimes justifiably plenty — wisely would not touch.

The Blackfriars' Guild presented four exhibits: *Don't George!*, *Home Is The Hero*, *Simon's Wife*, and *Slice It Thin!* The first was the species of comedy that shows up periodically on the commercial stage and is forthwith dispatched by critical and audience apathy to the storehouse. The second, written by the Courtenay Savage who in the past had contributed plays to the commercial theatre with neither critical nor box-office success, was still another exhibit harping on the returned soldier theme and nowhere near the quality of even such returned soldier plays of the commercial stage as *Soldier's Wife*. The third was an amateurish Biblical play and not one ten-thousandth so good as any number of such Biblical plays of the Broadway theatre as *Family Portrait*, etc. And the fourth was a revue distinctly inferior to the musical shows produced by college boys.

The Hedgerow Theatre on its New York visit divulged

two new plays: the American *Tomorrow's Yesterday* and the Mexican *Quintin Quintana*. The American sample was such a garbled mixture of styles that it was next to impossible to make head or tail of it. The Mexican play betrayed symptoms of its young author's descriptive talent but many more of his dramaturgical innocence, and was further corrupted by his juvenile tendency to fall back upon naughty words and phrases by sanguine way of startling his audience out of its somnolence.

The little Provincetown Playhouse came into the picture with a brace of exhibits: *Korb'n* and the Spanish play hereinbefore mentioned. The former was a highly indignant affair about some of the world's ills and their possible cure which, while it proved that its author was sociologically minded, proved at the same time that righteous resentment and acceptable drama are frequently two very different things, and that he might have profited materially from consultation and collaboration with even some inferior commercial playwright. The Lorca exhibit was treated to so decrepit a performance by the Jane Street Group that what mild trace of poetry the script possesses went for nothing.

That, save for two plays uncovered by so-called experimenters in, respectively, the little President and the Barbizon-Plaza Theatres, represents the sum total of the afore-said commercial theatre's critics' perfumed dreams. These other plays were *Sweet Genevieve*, written by a pair of stage-struck sisters named Chute, and something called *Eternal Cage*. The former was so absurdly bad that its one and only audience had to stuff its handkerchief into its mouth to muffle its untoward hilarity. The latter, whose author was financed by a wealthy friend, dealt with a woman who dreams what she would do if she were rid of her husband's despotism and was so wholly incompetent and ridiculous that, compared with it, even some such ignoble specimen of the commercial drama as *And Be My Love* or *A Place Of Our Own* took on the appearance of a dramatic masterpiece.

As for the achievements of the experimental groups thus



far in the present season, refer to the record in the foregoing chapters.

It may possibly be argued that last season and this one up to the moment provided no fair criterion of the little experimental theatres' gifts and that, for all the poor showing, they are still invested with such an archebiosis as must eventually drive the anemic commercial theatre into the discard, or at least into the shamed shadows. Maybe so. To be perfectly equitable about it, let us wait and see. Meanwhile, let us console ourselves that a commercial theatre which, even in its doldrums, coincidentally has given us such things as *Dark Of The Moon* and *The Glass Menagerie*, to say nothing of *The Late George Apley*, *A Bell For Adano*, *Harvey*, *I Remember Mama*, and *The Deep Mrs. Sykes*, among others, is not so odious an institution after all.

# BEGGARS ARE COMING TO TOWN

OCTOBER 27, 1945

*A play by Theodore Reeves. Produced by Oscar Serlin for 25 performances in the Coronet Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

MAURICE	<i>Herbert Berghof</i>	MRS. BENNETT RICHARDSON
FELIX	<i>Alfred Linder</i>	<i>Adrienne Ames</i>
EMILE	<i>Julius Bing</i>	BENNETT RICHARDSON
DAVE	<i>E. G. Marshall</i>	<i>Austin Fairman</i>
PASQUAL	<i>Joseph Rosso</i>	ZIGGIE <i>Louis Gilbert</i>
NOLL TURNER	<i>Luther Adler</i>	WILSON'S WASTRELS
LOU	<i>Harry Kadison</i>	<i>Cedric Wallace Trio</i>
FRANKIE MADISON	<i>Paul Kelly</i>	NICK PALESTRO <i>George Mathews</i>
FLORRIE DUSHAZE		HEINZ <i>Tom Pedit</i>
	<i>Dorothy Comingore</i>	SKINNER <i>Arthur Hunnicutt</i>
JONATHAN WEBLEY	<i>Harold Young</i>	GOLDIE <i>Harry M. Cooke</i>

SYNOPSIS: *The office of the Avignon, a New York supper club.*

Time. *The present.* Act I. Scene 1. 6:00 p.m. Scene 2. 8:00 p.m. Act II. Scene 1. *A half hour later.* Scene 2. *An hour later.* Act III. *Midnight.*

Director: *Harold Clurman.*

IN THE LONG course of my theatregoing I figure that I must have seen no less than one hundred plays in which someone returns from an extended term in jail, finds that an old associate, whom he trusted, has swindled him, and sets out to get even. This is the one hundred and first. Thinking to sauce up the beardy plot, the author has made his Jean Valjean a Prohibition era speakeasy operator and has put him through the post-jail period in a vengeful set-to with his cheating former partner, now the overlord of a fancy contemporary night club. But except for a few moments in the last act in which the returned racketeer is persuaded, hardly to the entire conviction of the audience, that the old racket is a thing of the past and that things today are run on pious business principles, the play remains essentially the same one that we have engaged from time to time since the dis-

tant days when Edmond Dantes escaped from prison and celebrated his release by jumping on a cardboard rock and almost breaking his neck when the stagehands on their hands and knees raised hell with the green canvas waves below him.

To make matters even less electric, the author has peopled his relic with all the figures out of the old Prohibition gangster plays and films, familiar to the trade since the years when any especially bad actor with a congealed face and a carriage which suggested that he was further paralyzed from the chin down was accepted as a considerable artist and a wonderfully realistic interpreter of character. All the boys and girls, along with the old night club setting, are again in evidence: the dumb-cluck minor mobster, the love-lorn cigarette girl in the abbreviated costume, the oily headwaiter, the imperturbable night club boss, the slumming society lady and her fat oaf of a husband, the fresh newspaper reporter, etc. The only one missing is the dry-voiced detective in derby or gray slouch hat, and if the management had been able to hire a Thomas Jackson or Millard Mitchell he probably also would have been present.

Harold Clurman's stage direction, which followed the pattern of the gangster plays of the 1920's in pacing the performance with the portentous calm of a man beseeched to invest in a revival of *Mr. Strauss Goes To Boston* heightened the evening's disability. Nor was the disability minimized by Luther Adler's portrayal of the night club sovereign in terms of a stoic Ludwig Lewisohn, Paul Kelly's convict hero who registered his grim resolution throughout by a tight-lipped inhalation of the letter M, or Miss Dorothy Comingore who seemed somehow to imagine that tender, sentimental appeal was best to be projected by gazing raptly at her male vis-à-vis' nose and simultaneously baring her teeth in a Cab Calloway grin.

In a pre-production deal, the movies acquired the play by making a down payment of 100,000 dollars and agreeing to a full percentage share of the film's gross, which provides a critical estimate of its inverse dramatic value.

It is perfectly true that a playwright may take a theme,

like this one, which is so old that it can hardly stand on its feet and by skilful treatment make it again seem as lively as a cocker spaniel. Yet the revivifying calls not only for such an agile fellow but for one who appreciates that the theme is indeed a venerable one and who does not imagine that it is something hot off the stove and that he was the first to think it up. A sizable share of our present day playwrights who are so young that their knowledge of drama dates not much farther back than Anne Nichols and whose theatregoing has very apparently been confined to the Roxy and Radio City movie houses, do not seem, however, to fall into that category. They hit upon an idea that already had one foot in the grave before Owen Davis was born and privilege themselves hysterics over the belief that what they have got hold of is not only strikingly original but even pretty sensational, and that audiences on getting an earful of it will fall out of their seats in a paroxysm of excitement.

Not only these younger men but now and again even playwrights of more distant vintage thus present themselves in the light of overjoyed discoverers of sun-dials. This business of fooling themselves into believing that old and familiar themes, plots, situations, and characters are virginal and dewy is becoming more and more common among the former in particular and, since their finesse in treating them is most often negligible, is responsible for exiling or re-exiling them to Hollywood, where age does not shrivel nor custom impair any kind of tried-and-true claptrap and where dramatic skill, so the successful Nunnally Johnson has analyzed it, consists mainly and strictly in writing lines of dialogue as if they were so many ten-word telegrams.

Dan Totheroh, for example, in an interview before his *Live Life Again* opened and closed after two performances, allowed that the play would come as a great surprise to those familiar with his previous plays and intimated that the surprise would be induced by the strangeness and complete novelty of its theme. His theme, as hereinbefore noted, turned out to be in large part a modern paraphrase of *Hamlet*. He was unaware that Arthur Hopkins some years ago had negotiated much the same paraphrase in a

play called *Conquest*, which did not get anywhere either. Hopkins is, furthermore, not the only one who has toyed with the idea. Paraphrasing *Hamlet* for long has been a favorite pastime of playwrights and the literati in general, among them Hauptmann, who concocted one such modern treatment about fifteen years ago. Many of the plays thus posture as something right out of the wine bottle but have become so full of dregs from long standing that one is able barely to see the chianti.

At this point, the inevitable heckler naturally pops up once again with the habitual retort that, after all, there are no really new ideas in the world, that all of them have been used before, and that the best one should expect is something that has just the superficial air of being new. This is largely nonsense. In our late time a variety of playwrights have produced some quite new dramatic ideas in one direction or another: Shaw and Dunsany and O'Neill, Pirandello and Georg Kaiser, Evreinoff and Giacosa, among numerous others. And even if we can not have new ideas, we may ask the boon of some with at least that superficial air of being new which our heckling friend mentions. But we seldom get even that. And when it comes to our heckler's stereotype about everything depending upon treatment, I hope that I will not too vociferously be accused of critical treason when I say that it would be acceptable if some livelier ideas were also to accompany treatment, however meritorious. All too frequently there are mothballs in the imaginations of even those of our playwrights who are otherwise exemplary.

It is thus that, when a Saroyan comes along, his plays, whatever their admitted lapses, at least bring a welcome fresh breeze with them. It is thus that, when a novice like Margaret Curtis appears with something like *A Highland Fling*, the authentic novelty of it can not be assimilated and appreciated by the public and the critics, who have been dosed up for so long with staleness that they have become contentedly used to it and are allergic to anything else. It is thus that in personal desperation producers are forced to fall back upon revivals, and paraphrases both dra-

matic and musical of the classics, and scene designers who can invest mildewed plays with some visual novelty, and favorite star actors or even movie names who may distract attention from the cobwebbed stuff that serves as their vehicles. It is thus, further, that season in and season out we get plays whose courses are perfectly evident shortly after their first curtains go up, and musicals that have to interrupt themselves with extended ballets in order to make their customers forget for the time being their blue-print courses. It is thus that smut has occasionally to be resorted to to evoke the attention of a public that would otherwise remain apathetic to plot routine and situation age. It is thus, generally, that the life missing from plays has to be made up for by all kinds of extrinsic chicane.

Plays in our midst today have become for the most part as set in their inspiration, and as unvarying, as the drinks that have been unvaryingly served in them for a century and more: sherry, port or Madeira in drama, champagne in musicals. The themes, treated much alike, parade endlessly their stencils: the course of true love never runs smoothly (which is bosh); sexual coldness invariably sets in after a few years of married life (which is bosh); children are wiser than their parents (which is bosh); a woman of twenty-five married to a man of forty-five is inevitably fetched by a younger man (which is bosh); and business men spend all their time thinking of nothing but office business and never of the monkey variety (comment unnecessary). So, month after month, year after year, it goes. For one fresh *Arsenic And Old Lace*, we are vouchsafed the theatrical credo that professional prostitutes are virgins in their souls and usually end up as faithful wives, good mothers, and members of the board of directors of the Y.W.C.A. For one shining *Harvey*, it is twenty to one on either the glory of mother love or the tragic consequences of it. For one *My Heart's In The Highlands* or *The Beautiful People*, gleaming like a white pebble among brown gravel, there is a load of the younger generation versus the older, the female youngster who is thought by her distracted parents to be *enceinte*, and the pathological character who commits mur-

der for some such reason as that he passed a butcher's shop in his youth and became fascinated by a bloody rump steak in the window.

We do not ask for the moon, or for a new Ibsen or Strindberg or even George Birmingham. But we have got to the point where even an *Uncle Tom's Cabin* with Topsy instead of Eva going to Heaven on the gold wires would be in the nature of a godsend.

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 THE NEXT HALF-HOUR. OCTOBER 29, 1945

*A play by Mary Chase. Produced by Max Gordon for 8 performances in the Empire Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

BARNEY BRENNAN	<i>Conrad Janis</i>	JAMES O'NEILL	<i>Art Smith</i>
MARGARET BRENNAN	<i>Fay Bainter</i>	ROSIE HIGGINS	<i>Esther Owen</i>
PAT BRENNAN	<i>Jack Ruth</i>	JESSIE SHOEMAKER	<i>Thelma Schnee</i>
FRANCES BRENNAN	<i>Pamela Rivers</i>	BRIDGET O'NEILL	<i>Jean Adair</i>
PETER O'NEILL	<i>Francis Compton</i>	MCCRACKEN	<i>Larry Oliver</i>

SYNOPSIS: *The scene is the living-room of the home of Margaret Brennan on a night in early April, 1913, in an American city. Act I. An evening in early April. Act II. Later in the evening. Act III. Shortly after.*

Director: *George S. Kaufman.*

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AS MRS. CHASE originally wrote *Harvey* and as has been earlier recorded, the rabbit was visible to the audience. Brock Pemberton, as further recorded, finally persuaded her in the interest of the audience's imagination to make it invisible, and the play, which doubtless would have been a failure, was turned into a success. As Mrs. Chase has now written this *The Next Half-Hour*, her banshee is invisible to the audience. If Max Gordon, her producer, and George Kaufman, her director, had taken an oblique cue from Pemberton, had made it visible and had left all the rest of the characters to the audience's imagination, the play, which was a prompt failure, might possibly in a like way have been turned into a success. Or at least into a very much more interesting affair than it was.

If you deplore such criticism as flippant and unworthy of what was intended as a serious effort, you should have seen the play as it stood and, if then you continued to regard it as flippant, all I can say is that your conception of really constructive criticism is debatable.

What the author tried to write was a mystical Irish semi-folk play dealing with a woman privy to the warning wails of the banshee who learns eventually that, for all her trust



in premonitions, God has His own way of ordaining fate. What she actually wrote was a synthetic and bogus theatrical exhibit the mysticism of which was confined to the star actress' fixed, vacant stares at the balcony, the Irish of which consisted in ending up sentences with "at all, at all" and having the characters say "And now go along with you," and the folk quality of which rested mainly in the older male characters' baggy pants, the incorporation — following a young girl's "Tell me about the Old Country, uncle" — of a long-winded Celtic fairy tale, and an aged woman dressed up like a Drury Lane Christmas pantomime witch who tottered on several times, ominously quavered various unintelligible sounds, and suggested the late Madame Janauschek in a revival of the *The Rogers Brothers In Ireland*. Mrs. Chase's Celtic lyricism, further, reposed chiefly in such locutions as "Now get you off"; her Celtic philosophical wit in such observations as "A woman hates to let a man have a wee bit of pleasure"; and her American dramaturgical economy in such dismissal dialogue as "But why do we have to talk of such things?"

Mr. O'Kaufman's stage direction was evidently inspired in part by a contemplation of the comportment of an Irish terrier. Whenever an Irish terrier observes that people are not paying enough attention to him, he sets about correcting the situation by frantic dashes around the room, tempestuous runnings over the furniture, and wild convolutions on the floor. Correctly fearful that audiences would not pay sufficient attention to Mrs. Chase's play, Mr. O'Kaufman instructed his Irish characters similarly to conduct themselves much as if stairways were built solely for the purpose of Paavo Nurmi's Spring training and doorways for the combined use of Jesse Owens and Gunder Haegg. In addition, he carelessly permitted the women of the lower middle class household in their otherwise appropriate dowdiness to support the theory that most Broadway drama is apparently built around that climactic period in women's lives when they have just bought themselves trim nylon stockings and new shoes.

The acting, within an aptly designed setting by Edward

Gilbert, was, except for the performances of Conrad Janis as the son whose death the banshee slips up on and Pamela Rivers in the minor role of the daughter, lamentable. Fay Bainter's banshee-minded mother was merely a series of moving picture postures accompanied by energetic face-makings supposedly indicative of forebodings; Thelma Schnee's sexually wayward wife belonged in a free beer and pretzel melodrama; Jean Adair's Irish spinster was a relative of the Russell Brothers and George Munroe; and the others were little better.

Mr. O'Gordon missed only putting some of Sullivan's tunes into the show and calling it *Banshee Pinafore*.

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## THE SECRET ROOM. NOVEMBER 7, 1945

*A psychological melodrama by Robert Turney. Produced by Joseph M. Hyman and Bernard Hart in association with Haila Stoddard for 21 performances in the Royale Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

NOONIE BEVERLY	Jane Earle	DR. JACKSON	Ivan Simpson
SUSAN BEVERLY	Frances Dee	LEDA FERRONI	
SISTER	Fuzzy McQuade		Eleonora Mendelssohn
DR. JOHN BEVERLY		COLONEL HAMMOND	Albert Bergh
	Reed Brown, Jr.	SAMUELS, AN INTERNE	
MRS. SMITKIN	Juanita Hall		Charles S. Dubin
MARGARET BEVERLY	Grace Coppin		

**SYNOPSIS:** Act I. Scene 1. *An afternoon in late spring.* Scene 2. *One hour later.* Act II. Scene 1. *Late afternoon on Christmas Eve of the same year.* Scene 2. *A night some two weeks later.* Act III. *30 minutes later.*

*The action takes place in the living-room of the Beverly house in the country. Time. Spring, 1944.*

Director: Moss Hart.

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**T**HE URGE to lend a measure of weight and significance to plays that haven't any by attaching a psychological label or veneer to them has now also overcome Mr. Turney. What Mr. Turney, despite the veneer, offers remains, however, simply a melodrama about an Italian woman who had been raped by the Nazis, whose impromptu baby had been taken from her, and who seeks emotional recompense in alienating and then trying to kidnap from their mother the children of the American household into which she has been taken as a refugee. Incidental to the action is her murder of the man who knows her case history and would reveal it to the family, along with her attempted murder of the mother. Granting that audiences may possibly sometimes be a little backward, it still does not seem that Freud, Jung and Co. have to be dragged in to convince them that a woman who had gone through any such experience would

be inclined to a state of mind not exactly normal, and that she might even at times conduct herself in a manner somewhat different from that of other women. The necessity for bringing in a psychiatrist, to say nothing of a medico, to explain her idiosyncrasies is not, it may be allowed, painfully obvious.

The play about a woman who had been betrayed, who had been robbed of her child, and whose mother-love leads her into not dissimilar acts has been no stranger to the stage. In the heyday of melodrama, many years ago, it could be relied upon to put in an appearance at pretty regular intervals. That was before the time of the Freuds and Jungs and before playwrights felt any compulsion scientifically to instruct their audiences in the reasons why their heroines were impelled to act as they did, the reasons being as plain as mud. Now and again, if they thought that any additional explanation ought to be included on behalf of the more intellectually tardy adolescents, with bean-shooters, in the gallery, they would simply have Grandpa say a few words, since it was accepted in those days that any grandfather character was by virtue of his white whiskers and rheumatism the repository of considerable wisdom. Or if the cast of characters included no grandfather, the few remarks could be and usually were safely entrusted to a middle-aged uncle who had travelled widely, often as far as Boston, and who indicated his worldly knowledge and urbanity by not striking a match on the seat of his trousers. And the melodramas, artless as they were, sufficed for their immediate purpose.

Came then the Freudian dawn, and it was not so very long before the descendants of the old playwrights kicked out Grandpa and Uncle as being altogether too innocent for audiences whose mentality had progressed to the point where they demanded plays like *The Squaw Man* and *The Green Hat*. These heirs and assigns, who had read a book and were educated, concluded that the ideas of Grandpa and Uncle on human behavior might be satisfactory to an audience that had got in for ten, twenty, or thirty cents but that for one which paid up to three dollars and a half

couvert it was only meet to substitute for the pair one or more actors in cutaway coats and with goatees and to load up their dialogue for extra good measure with such five dollar words as "libido" and "subconscious," such six dollar ones as "ambivalent" and "trauma," and such ten dollar honeys as "pædophilia" and "cryptamnesia."

All this, of course, did not happen at once. There was a relatively brief try-out period during which the new play-writing brain trust got its wind ready for the really big jump. That was the period in which the trust analyzed a protagonist's impulse to murder as generated not by any such former widely accepted and very silly theory that he disliked his victim, but by the sinister influence exerted upon him by something like a cat's-eye scarf-pin worn by the imminent corpse or by a glass paper-weight that hypnotized him when the light shone on it.

But when the big jump came, the kindergarten Freuds, Jungs and Stekels not only dived right in, but splashed around like woofed porpoises, wetting the drama for miles around. It now became a rare occasion when melodrama didn't literally drip with psychology, psychoanalysis, psychiatry, psychopathology and almost everything else beginning with "p," except maybe persuasion. Actors who could manipulate a pince-nez suspended from a black cord and who sufficiently resembled a dentist came into great demand for the roles of profound scientists in mental disorders. Actresses, formerly perfectly competent in the roles of murderesses, had to forget everything that perfectly competent directors had formerly told them and had to comport themselves in the roles as if they were nervous amateurs afflicted with stage-fright, thus giving wonderful portrayals of women suffering from a combination of schizophrenia, dementia præcox, and enuresis. And though the melodramas for the most part became worse and worse as entertainment, the impressed critics loved them. Meanwhile, an authentic dramatist like O'Neill, some of whose essentially melodramatic plays were as full of psychology and pathology as half a dozen *Hamlets*, still did not see the need of smiting their audiences with the fact by lugging in

actors made up to look like Smith Ely Jelliffe or Gregory Zilboorg and having them talk like Sorbonne Dr. Munyons.

Turney's play, with or without its psychiatric filigree, is poor, even preposterous, melodrama on all counts. Its hoped-for suspense consists entirely in the sudden appearances of its female villain in doorways, ever with such a ferocious look on her face as would scare the wits out of the witless persons who are scared by Mr. Boris Karloff. Its two small children characters are on the stage for the greater part of the evening and, as here acted, anyone who could decipher what they were talking about would be able to render a spot news elucidation of *Finnegans Wake*. Its writing suggests that Turney got his thesaurus mixed up with a copy of Kenneth Webb's play, *Zombie*, into which someone had slipped the script of *Guest In The House*. And its symbolic secret room, which on the stage was shown to be almost big enough to house Billy Rose's *Jumbo*, called less for the machinations of his protagonist than for those of Bert Lahr.

The exhibit, in short, was a botch from first to last. The Carolyn Hancock setting, supposedly representing the living-room of a country house, looked like the lobby of the Algonquin Hotel; and the stage lighting by Frederick Fox was a salmagundi of pinks, purples, ambers, blues, and other shades considerably less relevant to a room in a country house than to a Broadway night club floor-show. Moss Hart's direction alternately resolved the hapless actors into sprinters and living statues. Under it, Eleanora Mendelssohn, who appeared in several of the late Reinhardt's companies in Germany, presented a performance of the refugee murderess which closely resembled the late Nance O'Neil in one of her more celebrated portrayals of an hysterical refrigerator; Frances Dee, the Hollywood film actress, played the role of the mother as if George Kaufman were grooming her to outrun *The Next Half-Hour* team; and the others comported themselves as if a psychiatrist had advised them to give up acting.

SECOND ONLY to *Hairpin Harmony* and *The Duchess Misbehaves* (q.v.), produced respectively in the 1943-1944 season and in the one here considered, this is the worst musical show of the decade. Its book, which has to do with a house-painter mistakenly commissioned to do the murals for a museum, reaches its highest humor in the remark, "I

appeal to you as a woman," with the retort, "You don't even appeal to me as a man." There were those in the audience, however, who preferred "Aren't you taking along a bag?" with the reply, "No, she's not coming with me." The lyrics in turn attain their wittiest point in a ditty called "I Want To See More Of You," sung by the house-painter to a young woman whom he has caught a glimpse of in a shower-bath. The music is an orchestration of the mellifluous sounds produced by hitting a wash-boiler alternately with a saxophone and a potato-masher. The costumes were apparently designed by the composer. The smut may be inferred from a song entitled "Let's Do And Say We Didn't." The male comedian's chief funny business involves the adjustment of a brassière to his chest; the female comic's, the lifting of a small man off the floor in order to kiss him. The scenery, by the erstwhile commendable Albert Johnson, resembles the kind encountered in summer hotel shows. The orchestra, under the direction of Harry Levant, played the numbers over its left shoulders, with its eyes roaming the audience. And the performers were for the most part out of the road grab-bag.

In such cases, it is often the habit of professional disputants to proclaim, "Nothing can be as wholly bad as all that; there must be *something* good about it." In this particular case, the disputants are right, in a way. The twenty-five minute ballet which concludes the first act employs an actor to stand on a papier-mâché rock and explain to the audience what it is all about. That is the show's sole virtue, since without the explanation, which confides that what is going on is a battle between a whale and a fisherman for the fickle affections of the sea, the audience might be pardoned for believing that what it was seeing was simply a man in brown skin-tights wrestling with a female dancer in a green dress and bruising her sacro-iliac before another man in a Rutgers college sweater bashes him in the jaw.

Perhaps the show enjoys even a second virtue. A dance team comes on twice and offers, with no further explanation, some dirty dances. This is a relief. I don't know how you may feel about it, but as for me I am getting a bit tired



of being instructed by a program, chiefly at the colored musical shows, that the lot of umbilical propulsions, hip shakings and rump circumrotations which I am looking at are really nothing of the sort but very high-toned choreographic art depicting the soul stirrings of the Hindu goddess Hatikarnagi when, in a secret religious ritual, she contemplates the mystery of the celestial Fifth Dimension. I am, I hope, a not altogether offensive lowbrow, but all that I can say is that it doesn't look that way to me. It isn't that I don't try to make myself believe that what the program says is going on is what is going on. I am noted for being open-minded and hospitable to art in all its phases. But I no longer can be in such instances. There was a time when I could and when I was mildly persuaded that the spectacle of a man and woman conducting themselves in a manner that would get them thrown out of Roseland on their ears was right up the æsthetic alley and meant that their bodies had been possessed by the spirit of an Haitian tribal deity named Meshookka. But not today. What it means to me now that I have grown up is nothing more than is you is o' is you ain't my baby.

Being a man of democratic tastes, I can enjoy myself at a little of the rough stuff, but too much is too much. Just one good old-fashioned waltz that didn't represent or depict anything but a waltz would help the shows and me enormously. Even allowing that the program tells the whole truth and that the dances are perfectly authentic, there is surely a deal of difference when they are done by dirty, ragged, native blacks in a West Indies jungle on the one hand and, on the other, by a beauty-parlored and smartly costumed colored lady surrounded on a Broadway stage by a group of boys and girls who look as if their next stop was the Zanzibar night club. On the whole, when it comes to such religious ceremonial dancing, I find it much easier to believe in God when I look at Bill Robinson's.

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## THE RICH, FULL LIFE. NOVEMBER 9, 1945

*A play by Viña Delmar. Produced by Gilbert Miller for 27 performances in the Golden Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

LOU FENWICK	Judith Evelyn	LAWRENCE	Frederic Tozere
MOTHER FENWICK	Jessie Busley	FRED	Frank M. Thomas
CARRIE	Edith Meiser	RICKY LATHAM	Jonathan Braman
CYNTHIA	Virginia Weidler	MISS MCQUILLEN	Ann Shoemaker
FREDONIA	Sandra Holman		

**SYNOPSIS:** *The action takes place in the living-room of the Fenwick home. Act I. Scene 1. An afternoon in early spring. Scene 2. The next morning. Act II. Scene 1. Early Saturday evening. Scene 2. Later the same evening. Scene 3. Quarter to two the same night. Act III. Early evening, the following Tuesday.*

Director: Gilbert Miller.

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**T**HIS is another venture backed by Hollywood capital. Through a pre-production deal, the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer company purchased the film rights to the play and further also owns a twenty-five percent interest in it. The picture rights were acquired for a down payment of 75,000 dollars against a ceiling price of 225,000. In view of the quality of the offering, Mr. Miller, its producer, apparently entertains a somewhat greater respect for money than for the drama.

Miss Delmar, the author of the future film, was last represented on Broadway sixteen years ago by a pulp novel in dramatic form called *Bad Girl*, which also constitutionally became a movie, since it was one of those teasing excursions into the sexual life which at the time, together with the mixtures of sin and religion, were so dear to the cinema fancy. In this case, however, it is difficult to see why the film people were so eager to lay out such copious monies. The play basically is just another in the long line of exhibits wherein the serious illness of a child brings about the reconciliation of warring family elements and

the Hollywood business geniuses might quite as profitably have bought any one of two dozen of them for relative peanuts.

The clue to the prodigality may possibly have been found in the film company's intention to cast one of its new young actresses, Elizabeth Taylor, in the play by way of getting her a preliminary Broadway reputation. For one reason or another, the girl was withdrawn at the last moment and another junior film actress, Virginia Weidler, drafted in her stead. Miss Weidler is an exceptionally talented youngster and her performance, save for occasional over-direction which made her in her well moments act with such breeziness as would have upset an eighty-foot sailboat and in her ailing with such tottering wanness as would have befitted a troupe of Camilles, was an excellent one, in fact one of the few fully endorsable ones by a screen player in a number of years.

So far as her play — which is less a play than a sketchy outline of one — goes, all that Miss Delmar has added to its elderly theme is the philosophy that it is well for a young girl to be privileged a good time now and then so that when eventually she settles down to the routine of married life she may have happy memories to fall back upon. The philosophy, it may be allowed, is not sufficiently startling to inspirit anew the aged materials. Nor are those materials handled with any appreciable understanding. It is, for example, rather confounding to an audience to observe that a young girl critically ill with pneumonia is permitted to remain in her small, unequipped bedroom in a run-down middle-class household with no attention save from a desultory doctor relative who evidently does not consider the advisability of getting her to a hospital as quickly as possible and who, if he has ever heard of penicillin, sulfa drugs or even an oxygen tent, gives no indication of the fact. It is, in addition, a bit hard for even the most sentimental of audiences to believe that a girl threatened with death may suddenly be cured, or at least be set on the way to a quick cure, by bringing to her bedside the boy with whom she is

in love and having him — and in her condition — tell her funny stories that make her rock with laughter. And it is, finally, scarcely a symptom of able dramaturgy to rely upon telephone and door bells at ten minute intervals to occupy characters otherwise unoccupied by the playwright and who, due to a deficiency in dramatic invention, intermittently find themselves at loose ends and alone on the stage.

The play is, further, still another specimen of what may be called the stairway drama. The stairway drama is that species of the art in which a flight of steps, along with its collateral exercises, substitutes in greater part for a script's lack of action. It has flourished since the days of *Editha's Burglar* and has frequently provided a field-day for scene designers. While in the present instance Raymond Sovey has partly restrained himself, things have come to the point where more often we are introduced to simple interior sets which, for no good reason and simply because the designers can not resist a little artistic self-expression, include such staircases as have seldom been encountered outside the Palazzo Vespucci or an old-time St. Louis sporting house and which, when the plain, everyday characters descend them, suggest the big throne room scene in the old road productions of *In The Palace Of The King* with Emil, the local butcher's boy hired as an extra, grandly making his entrance as one of the dukes.

The company presenting Miss Delmar's potential Hollywood classic was, aside from the little Weidler, an indifferent congregation. Judith Evelyn, for example, who made a highly favorable impression in *Angel Street* and who was further eulogized by the majority of the reviewers for her performance in this case, seemed to at least one observer to be merchanting merely the old stock company histrionics in the role of the mother and to be depicting the desperations of the humdrum life by slouching her shoulders and dragging her feet after her, inner turmoil by bending in at the girdle and indulging in convulsive physiognomic operations, and maternal solicitude and agony by a combination of the two. The nature of the poor

girl's performance, however, may possibly have been predicated on a role which imposed upon her such dialogue as this:

*Miss Evelyn:* Your mother and Carrie were here today.

*Mr. Tozere:* What made them drop in?

*Miss Evelyn:* Your mother's kidneys.

## THE RUGGED PATH. NOVEMBER 10, 1945

*A play by Robert E. Sherwood. Produced by the Playwrights' Company for 81 performances in the Plymouth Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

MOREY VINION	<i>Spencer Tracy</i>	KAVANAGH	<i>Sam Sweet</i>
HARRIET VINION	<i>Martha Sleeper</i>	DOCTOR	<i>Howard Ferguson</i>
GEORGE BOWSMITH		COSTANZO	<i>William Sands</i>
	<i>Clinton Sundberg</i>	GUFFEY	<i>David Stone</i>
LEGGATT BURT	<i>Lawrence Fletcher</i>	HAL FLEURY	<i>Gordon Nelson</i>
CHARLIE	<i>Henry Lascoe</i>	COLONEL RAINSFORD	
PETE KENNEALLY	<i>Ralph Cullinan</i>		<i>Clay Clement</i>
FRED	<i>Nick Dennis</i>	GREGORIO FELIZARDO	<i>Vito Christi</i>
GIL HARTNICK	<i>Rex Williams</i>	CATALINO	<i>Robin Taylor</i>
EDITH BOWSMITH	<i>Jan Sterling</i>	HAZEL	<i>Kay Loring</i>
FIRTH	<i>Theodore Leavitt</i>	JAMIESON	<i>Emory Richardson</i>
ALBOK	<i>Paul Alberts</i>	MAJOR GENERAL MACGLORN	
DIX	<i>Sandy Campbell</i>		<i>Ernest Woodward</i>
STAPLER	<i>Lynn Shubert</i>		

### *Filipino Soldiers and Civilians*

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *The Vinions' home. June 21, 1941.* Scene 2. *Kenneally's Downtown Bar & Grill. The next day.* Scene 3. *George Bowsmith's office. The next day.* Scene 4. *Kenneally's Downtown Bar & Grill. A few days later.* Scene 5. *The Vinions' home. A few days later.* Act II. Scene 1. *Mess compartment on the destroyer "Townsend." June, 1944.* Scene 2. *George Bowsmith's office. Three weeks later.* Scene 3. *Colonel Rainsford's headquarters. The same day.* Scene 4. *Colonel Rainsford's headquarters. Some days later.* Scene 5. *A jungle outpost. The next morning.* Scene 6. *A room in the White House. Spring - 1945.*

Director: *Garson Kanin.*

MR. SHERWOOD once defined a playwright's requirements thus: "He must be sensitive, imaginative, naïve, gullible, passionate; he must be something of an imbecile, something of a poet, and something of a damn fool." On this occasion, Mr. Sherwood, though surely neither an imbecile nor a damn fool, presents himself in the other less

flattering lights, with sensitivity, imagination, and poetry nowhere visible in his equipment. His play is for the major part a carpentered job which belatedly plows up ground already deeply furrowed, and is without critical merit save possibly for those whom he himself in one of his play's passages ridicules for esteem of mere sincerity. What he offers is essentially an overly extended and at all times exoteric rewriting of the rococo exhibit about the idealistic newspaper editor who, unable longer to tolerate the principles of the paper's executive and his henchmen, resigns and goes forth to make, in one way or another, a better world. The theme has occupied playwrights for the last half century, and only last season again appeared, decidedly for the worse, in a play called *A Place Of Our Own*. Here, Mr. Sherwood has employed it propaganda-wise in connection with the last war, and orates it into undutious theatre with incorporated speeches on the evils of a journalism which bows to rich advertisers, of a *laissez-faire* Americanism, and of an individual negligence in the matter of solidifying the peace. On none of these points is he particularly convincing, since conviction is hardly to be achieved through old, flat and stereotyped phraseology.

The routine nature of his processes of thought is plain from his own comment on his play, delivered with unconscious but very firm banality to an interviewer. "The first thing a writer can do," he asserted with a Moses-like inspiration, "is to take an interest in the peace. Then he must say over and over again that every individual American must develop an individual sense of obligation. The writer must point out that when the structure of a free democratic world breaks down, the individual bears a share in it. The writer must keep repeating, in every way, this sense of the responsibility of the individual. You see, where this country went wrong was when it began the deification of the doctrine of every man for himself. . . . It is the old concept that a factory owner can hire and fire anyone he pleases, that he can do anything he likes, regardless of any social responsibility. From this stems the Fascist idea that if a man is strong enough he is responsible to nobody but

himself." True to his statement, Mr. Sherwood's play repeats all this "over and over again" at the expense not only of interesting drama but of audience patience. In it, there is no faintest trace of the former relieving wit and humor of its author's *Reunion In Vienna*, no symptom of the former poetry of his *Acropolis*, no suggestion of the former critical observation of his *The Road To Rome*. Literality minus all rules the stage.

"Religiosity," Irwin Edman has written, "is the malaise that seems to assail many men of letters in middle life or later, a failure of nerve which they identify with the access of spiritual insight and vision." Mr. Sherwood's acquired religiosity takes the form of a delayed, amateur passion for political therapeutics and the brotherhood of man, which he identifies with the access of spiritual insight and vision. In this, he seems to be at one with his fellows who constitute the Playwrights' Company. It has come to be that most of their plays are basically so identical in theme, thought, and manner that when you have seen one you have seen all. In the case of this *The Rugged Path*, for example, one had difficulty in persuading one's self that what was being shown was not just another Maxwell Anderson *The Eve Of St. Mark* or *Storm Operation*, just another Elmer Rice *American Landscape*, just another Behrman *The Talley Method*, and just another Sherwood *There Shall Be No Night*. The Playwrights' Company, at least up to this point, has suffered from a severe attack of Roosevelt religiosity.

In the role of the idealistic editor, Spencer Tracy, returned to the stage after fifteen years wasted, save financially, in Hollywood, indicated that his competences as an actor had not, as is often the case, been riddled by the picture medium and gave a performance that injected at least a superficial belief into the unbelievable materials provided him. Jo Mielziner's settings, except for the usual papier-mâché and canvas palms jungle scene, were well contrived; and Garson Kanin's direction, notably in the instance of the darkened, sound-filled stage shadowing forth the bombed and sinking destroyer, if hardly in the last



curtain business with its illuminated American flag, was adequate to the play's fancied purposes.

The occasion gave renewed rise to the question of the critical merit of propaganda in drama, a question which increasingly climbs atop its own soapbox and lifts its dual voice with more and more of its customary eloquence, and still more and more of its customary vehemence. The arguments pro and con have now again mainly followed the established patterns. The pros have had at the cons with the familiar retort that most drama is propaganda of one sort or another, however the propaganda be concealed or unrecognized as such, and that there is no more sound reason against its presence than against the stage's electrical equipment's, which similarly sheds a valuable light on things. The cons in turn have had at the pros with the equally familiar thrust that propaganda, or what is theatrically defined as such, has no place in any play that pretends even faintly to dramatic art, and that its proper place is elsewhere, if indeed [*business of being loftily cynical*] anywhere at all.

While one is privileged to doubt whether there are two sides to every question, since a contrary belief would be hospitable to anyone who maintained that the earth was flat and that the Martini cocktail is a wonderful appetizer, there may be two to the question at issue, though it is to be suspected that one considerably outweighs the other.

When the talk is of propaganda, one takes it to mean not advocacy of those elements in private and personal life with which the pros seek cagily to camouflage their argument, but advocacy of elements in public, national, and international life. And by advocacy is meant in turn, very plainly, not soft persuasion, not insinuation, and not suggestion arising naturally out of the drama itself but rather independent insistence, exhortation, and even command. The difference is that between a playwright who proves his plea, whatever it may be, for his drama instead of permitting his drama to prove it for him. And the further difference is that between a green traffic light which automatically indicates progress and a traffic cop who accompanies it with

a loud, peremptory "Go!" Propaganda as we get it in the contemporary drama is that traffic cop, usually further equipped with a shrill whistle.

More than anything else it is this traffic cop in drama that has undone many of our modern American playwrights and much of our modern American playwriting. It has undone the better men and women along with the poorer; the wet rain has fallen on the just and the unjust alike. It has taken its grim toll of a Behrman, who began as a meritorious writer of serious comedy and who has vitiated his plays by infusions of so much propaganda for one cause or another that they have become, like *The Talley Method* and, most lately, *Dunnigan's Daughter*, indistinguishable from stages peopled by companies composed entirely of Mike Golds and their girls, with their faces made up. As Jay Carmody, critic for the *Washington Star*, aptly noted in regard to the latter play, "Behrman labors prodigiously to catapult the masses out of what is wrong with them; he whacks them with more words than thirty-six old-fashioned anarchists, but all he contrives to say is: 'People on the wrong side of the railroad track, unite!' Behrman's, sad to relate, is accordingly less likely to be the voice to lead the people out of soot and earshot of screeching locomotives than one to keep them out of the theatre." This, and properly, of a playwright who, before the spirochetes of flagrant propaganda poisoned his dramaturgy, wrote in *Rain From Heaven, et al.*, some of the most quietly intelligent and animating plays of our theatre.

The Sherwood under immediate discussion is another. More and more his plays seem to belong less on the stage of a theatre than on a radio political broadcast. And more and more his particular case indicates the personal and, in a manner of speaking, even artistic confusion into which his passion for propaganda has thrown him. He has, under its spell, been turned into a squirrel frantically dashing hither and thither in a rapidly rotating world cage and falling embarrassingly upon his tail. In *Idiot's Delight*, he heatedly argued the imbecility of wars, only a few years later to find himself with the turn of events just as heatedly

arguing for the holy justice of wars. In *There Shall Be No Night*, he subsequently cursed the Russians as bloody knaves and villains for their invasion of innocent Finland, only a short time later with still another turn of events to hail them as glorious Allies on the score of an identical invasion. That even he himself is conscious of his identity with *genus Sciurus* is to be appreciated from his apologia in connection with this *The Rugged Path*. "It was," he states, "written as an immediate post-war play and the idea is this: in our moment of triumph don't let us forget how wrong we [*Ed. note: "Where do you get that *we* stuff?" as the banana retorted while floating down the Mississippi*] were at one stage of the game."

Lillian Hellman, in *The Searching Wind*, which was partly foreshadowed by her *Watch On The Rhine*, became so confusedly involved in foreign relations propaganda that the play, what with its mechanically incorporated love element, gave the impression of Clare Boothe Luce and Helen Gahagan Douglas sitting hand-in-hand on the steps of the State Department patiently waiting for Philander C. Knox to come out. And most of Maxwell Anderson's later efforts, with their Democracy uproar, have proved to be little more than Benjamin Harrison torchlight processions, in blank verse.

Propaganda wears a variety of literary shirts. In the plays of the John Howard Lawson-Clifford Odets-Edward Chodorov coterie, it wears one wide open at the neck ostentatiously to reveal the hair on the chest and one that matches the choler of its wearers' faces with its own shade of red. In the plays of the Sherwood-Anderson set, it wears one of less violent shade tucked somewhat more fastidiously into the trousers, but popping its buttons none the less under its wearers' heavy breathing. In the plays of others, it even affects a necktie and parades the stage with an air of *sang-froid* but, unable presently to stand the modish strain, tugs open its collar and lets go, with its Adam's apple in the nude. And in all cases the shirt, under the contemporary dramatic dispensation, is studiously unlaundered in the interest of proletarian fashion.

There are, however, signs and tokens that this cowbell drama is slowly on the way out, which augurs well for the future. Though many of the older, established playwrights are still partial toward it, the more talented of the newer lot now and then seem to be willing to disregard it; and there are renegades, too, among even the older theatrical figures. Consider, for example, one like Harold Clurman, whose Group Theatre was the hotbed of such drama. Turning turtle, Clurman now expresses himself thus: "I, for one, am tired of hearing about plays of social significance, although heaven knows I've been associated with them. I think the qualifying phrase should be 'human significance.' The word 'social' has come to have about it a cachet of obnoxious urgency. It puts a curse on a play now to have it known as 'socially significant.' A smart author nowadays keeps his significances under wraps and is more concerned that his play should be known as 'good theatre.' The stage, I think, must get away from dealing in tracts."

Dramaturgy must again, in short, if it would be successful with audiences, abandon the iron fist and return to diplomacy. Set, ringing speeches, the penchant of the propaganda dramatist, must further give way to insinuation and to a play's natural, easy flow. No longer does an audience respond to one like this, for example, in Irwin Shaw's late *The Assassin*:

"The essential thing is quality. The quality . . . of a man's soul. Politics change. We must trust the quality of a man rather than the color of his politics. Today that's our only hope. If you would only fight beside Communists, and I would only fight beside Left Republicans, and young de Mauny would only fight beside Monarchists, France would be dead once and for all. But I believe that, deep down, under all the differences, we are good men and that we can operate for good ends. That's why, in spite of Marcel Vespéry (Admiral Darlan), I believe in the Americans. They are good people. That does not mean that I will not wrestle with them to change their politics and criticize you to change yours, but somehow we have a foundation I believe in. Somehow, we all believe in the human race, that

it deserves to live on the earth, and that there is hope it will learn how to live on the earth. As for de Mauny, I find his politics unrealistic. But his quality magnificent!"

What persuades an audience more greatly is much the same idea allowed casually, like the fragment of a tune hummed in the mind, to filter through a Saroyan's *The Time Of Your Life*.

No longer, as well, is an audience receptive, in a Tennessee Williams' *You Touched Me!*, to an Army aviator's extended diatribe on the future of too placid mankind, as was duly discovered shortly after the play opened and resulted in the amputation of the harangue. An audience clearly demonstrates its preference for a Tennessee Williams in the less didactic mood of a *The Glass Menagerie* and for a drunk's simply integrated, "Yes, movies! Look at them — all those glamorous people having adventures, gobbling the whole thing up! You know what happens? People go to the movies instead of moving. Hollywood characters are supposed to have all the adventures for everybody in America, while everybody in America sits in a dark room and watches them have them. . . ."

The newer dramaturgical injunction seems to be that when propaganda-wise you call something a son-of-a-bitch you had best smile.

It may be true that, in other directions, a soft answer turneth away wrath, but in the propaganda theatre it rather induces it, and much more auspiciously than one couched, as the propaganda playwrights customarily couch it, in thunder claps. An audience's indignation, left dormant by an excess of the playwright's own, better responds to and flourishes on whispers, hints, and adumbrations. The wrath of a Holmes-Lawrence *If This Be Treason* thus exercises none of the anti-war appeal exercised by the sardonic humor of a *Lysistrata*, and all the propaganda fury of a Toller's *No More Peace!*, an Irwin Shaw's *Bury The Dead*, and a Sherwood's *Idiot's Delight* fails to achieve half the effect that a gently ironic *The Good Soldier Schweik* does. The pro-Semitic violence of a Rice's *Flight To The West* gets nowhere, while the mild persuasion of a Schnitzler's

*Professor Bernhardt* or a Werfel's *Jacobowsky And The Colonel* measurably prospers.

And so with most propaganda plays. The yells and shouts against dictators in a Rice's *Judgment Day* deafen reaction, whereas the implications of a Capek's *Power And Glory* stimulate it. The screams and gesticulations against Fascism in an Odets' *Till The Day I Die* or a Reade's *The Shatter'd Lamp* are unavailing against the delicate innuendos of an early Behrman's *Rain From Heaven*. The howls and screeches on behalf of Labor in an Odets' *Waiting For Lefty* and a Sklar-Peters *Stevedore* die on the wind, but the calm of a Galsworthy's *Strife* blows warmth into the mind. And the *Deep Are The Roots* and the *Jebs* probably in the end are of less value to sympathetic consideration of the Negro problem than *The Green Pastures*.

The relatively most eloquent defense of Democracy is not to be found on the soap-boxes of the Sherwoods, the Andersons and the Rices, but in a pair of gay musical shows by George Kaufman and Co. called *Of Thee I Sing* and *I'd Rather Be Right*.

## ARE YOU WITH IT? NOVEMBER 10, 1945

*A musical comedy with book (based on the novel, Slightly Perfect, by George Malcolm-Smith) by Sam Perrin and George Balzer, tunes by Harry Revel, and lyrics by Arnold B. Horwitt. Produced by Richard Kollmar and James W. Gardiner for beyond the season's performances in, initially, the Century Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

MARGE KELLER	Jane Dulo	BUNNY LA FLEUR	Dolores Gray
MR. BIXBY	Sydney Boyd	SALLY SWIVELHIPS	Diane Adrian
MR. MAPLETON	Johnny Stearns	GEORGETTA	Buster Shaver
WILBUR HASKINS	Johnny Downs	OLIVE	Olive
VIVIAN REILLY	Joan Roberts	GEORGE	George
POLICEMAN	Duke McHale	RICHARD	Richard
"GOLDIE"	Lew Parker	STRONG MAN	William Lundy
BARTENDER	Lou Wills, Jr.	AERIALIST	Jane Deering
CARTER	Lew Eckels	OFFICE BOY	Hal Hunter
SNAKE CHARMER'S DAUGHTER	Jane Deering	1ST MUSICIAN	Lou Hurst
CICERO	Bunny Briggs	2ND MUSICIAN	David Lambert
CLEO	June Richmond	3RD MUSICIAN	Jerry Duane
A BARKER	Johnny Stearns	4TH MUSICIAN	Jerry Packer
BALLOON SELLER	Mildred Jocelyn	LOREN	Loren Welch

**SYNOPSIS:** Act I. Scene 1. A boarding house in Hartford, Conn., at 7:45 on a summer morning. Scene 2. Bushnell Park, Hartford, a moment later. Scene 3. Office of the Nutmeg Insurance Company. Scene 4. Bushnell Park a few minutes later. Scene 5. Joe's Barroom. Scene 6. Behind the tent of the "Plantation Minstrels." Scene 7. The midway. "Acres of Fun." Scene 8. Behind the Minstrel tent. Scene 9. Two train compartments. Scene 10. Behind the tent. Scene 11. The midway. Act II. Scene 1. Office of the Nutmeg Insurance Company. Scene 2. Behind the tent. Scene 3. "Acres of Fun" in Worcester. Scene 4. The tent. Scene 5. The train. Scene 6. Carter's office on the train. Scene 7. Inside the Midway Frolics tent. Scene 8. The midway.

Director: Edward Reveau.

**T**HIS IS THE KIND of show described by the reviewers as "lively." The adjective often means simply that negligible material has been staged in so quick a tempo that what, if

paced more slowly, would not be acceptable becomes so by virtue of the fact that an audience is not permitted time in which to be reflectively critical. What the show amounts to is a succession of more or less familiar vaudeville acts hung upon the suggestion of a book dealing with a humble insurance company actuary who misplaces a decimal point and in shame takes up with a carnival troupe. The various acts if played in front of the old, standard vaudeville stage curtains, drapes, and backdrops depicting Floogle Street would be received merely as vaudeville acts, but played as here before some fancy George Jenkins settings and further costumed by Willa Kim from designs by Raoul Pene du Bois they are elevated in social status in the minds of the customers.

For such customers, many of whom esteemed the old Palace Theatre above the Odéon or the Kammerspiele, the show is an eminently successful one. The more critically minded few, however, may withhold their esteem from such humor as "With her kind, you gotta give the two dollars to the minister" and "Even as a boy I had to scrimp and scrape; I saved every cent I stole"; from such wit as a female's plea for the abandonment of women's rights: "Let us learn to be adept in the art of being kept"; from such comedy as involves a pair of midgets; and from such dated stage numbers as consist in the chorus girls bathing and dressing in silhouette behind a scrim curtain. An evening furthermore devoted to incessant tap dancing, lyrics like "Are you on the beam, a Joe in the know?", songs about "Poor Little Me" rendered with serio-comic dolefulness by a fat colored woman, and a production number called "Vivian's Reverie" which is designed to recreate one's dream of the circus and proves to be a pathetically cheap and inept copy of the admirable similar number in the lamented spectacle *Jumbo*, is an evening hardly to be recorded as especially exuberant.

By way of credits may be mentioned an absence of those ballet numbers which in recent seasons have frequently further depressed already depressing shows, the prehensile Dolores Gray, who is something, and a book that at least



does not have Johann Sebastian Bach fall in love with Joan Roberts. Such minor virtues almost atone for the presence of the antiquated plot business about the person whose identity is only to be established by a birthmark on an embarrassing part of the anatomy.

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 THE TEMPEST. NOVEMBER 12, 1945

*A return engagement of the Shakespearean fantasy. Produced by Cheryl Crawford for 3 weeks' performances in the City Center Theatre.*

## CAST

SHIP-MASTER	Beaumont Bruestle	ARIEL	Vera Zorina
BOATSWAIN	Angus Cairns	CALIBAN	Canada Lee
ALONSO	Bram Nossen	FERDINAND	Albert Hachmeister
GONZALO	Robert Harrison	ADRIAN	Jack Bostick
ANTONIO	Joseph Hardy	TRINCULO	Wallace Acton
SEBASTIAN	Eugene Stuckmann	STEPHANO	Benny Baker
PROSPERO	Arnold Moss	SPIRITS	Peggy Allardice
MIRANDA	Diana Sinclair		Bernard Miller

Director: Margaret Webster.

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THE PRODUCTION was reviewed in detail in *The Theatre Book Of The Year, 1944-45*. The several cast changes did not improve it; it remained still what it originally was: a critically unsatisfactory presentation of the play. The exhibit, moreover, here suffered additionally from its surroundings. The graveyard interior of the City Center, its run-down and murky appearance, and its dilapidated, dirty seats hardly induced in one the proper mood for fantasy. It is not easy to drink in delicate poetry sitting in a chair whose burst springs assault nether regions already imbedded in souvenirs of chewing gum, let alone a chocolate drop or two and sizable kernels of molasses-covered popcorn. The spirit under such circumstances may not be too dismayed when the play is something like *Susan And God*, but with all the resolution in the world it finds itself unable to react mellifluously to one that sings of enchanted isles, and lovely nymphs and sprites, and peacocks flying amain, and heavenly music.

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 SKYDRIFT. NOVEMBER 13, 1945

*A play by Harry Kleiner. Produced by Rita Hassan for 7 performances and a loss of 80,000 dollars in the Belasco Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

PRIVATE PAUL RENNARD	CREW CHIEF	<i>Elk Wallach</i>
<i>Paul Crabtree</i>	SERGEANT ROBERT A. KANE	
CORPORAL KENNETH BRODY		<i>Alfred Ryder</i>
<i>Elliott Sullivan</i>	DONOVAN, SR.	<i>Roger Quinlan</i>
PRIVATE FITZROY DONOVAN	FRANCEY	<i>Olive Deering</i>
<i>Arthur Keegan</i>	DANNY	<i>Marty Miller</i>
PRIVATE MARIO BUCELLI	MRS. BUCELLI	<i>Lili Valenty</i>
<i>Zachary A. Charles</i>	MR. BUCELLI	<i>Wolfe Barzell</i>
PRIVATE EDWARD FRELING	ANGELINA	<i>Rosita Costo</i>
<i>William Chambers</i>	AUDRA	<i>Elsbeth Hofmann</i>
CO-PILOT	WAITER	<i>David Stewart</i>
PRIVATE NICKIE BUCELLI		
<i>Carl Specht</i>		

*Time. The past and the present. The action is continuous.*

*Director: Roy Hargrave.*

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FROM LOVER characters who somehow imagine that they heighten their romantic appeal by wearing shirts and trousers so slouchy that the late Heywood Broun would shudderingly have declined to appear in public in them;

From male characters of a mild and taciturn nature who wax profusely philosophical and exude cynical epigrams immediately they have had two drinks;

From young floozie characters wearing short checkered skirts that tightly embrace the fundamental embonpoint and who interpret their roles by crossing their legs six inches above the knees and dangling red handbags large enough to contain the books of the Corn Exchange Bank;

From blank verse drama characters played by actors whose previous jobs have been confined to plays like *Is Zat So?*, *Call Me Ziggy*, and *They Should Have Stood In Bed*;

From doctor characters who, examining other characters with stethoscopes screwed firmly into their ears, seem to be able to hear clearly everything that is being said by everybody else on the stage;

From characters in the Army Air Forces and the R.A.F. who after prolonged and nerve-shattering bombing flights are as overflowing with joyous animal spirits as Trixie Friganza;

From male Chinese servant characters who, though they allow they have lived in America for all of twenty-five years, still pronounce it "velly";

From characters called upon to play the piano who, in following the one being played off-stage, manipulate their fingers in such wise that, instead of seeming to play the Chopin nocturne which they are supposed to, appear to everyone in the audience to be playing *The Beer Barrel Polka*;

From characters who under the current stage dispensation do not perceptibly age after a lapse of twenty years, in contrast to those of yesterday who turned gray and were victims of acute arthritis complicated with phlegmonous gastritis after a lapse of only nine or ten;

From characters representing middle-aged bachelors who with hesitant self-criticism inform young girls enamoured of them that they are old enough to be their fathers, and from the young girl characters who laughingly do not believe them;

From extra characters, quickly identified by the audience, who appear successively as fashionable society folk and members of the gashouse gang;

From juvenile characters who imagine that they achieve an air of attractive breeziness by leaving their shirt collars unbuttoned and knotting their four-in-hands loosely;

From characters who, supposed to be writing letters, in the interest of realism write out every word, thus holding up the play's action for two or three minutes instead of, as in the older days, getting the business quickly over with a few scratches of the pen;

From excessively genial female Negro servant characters;

From all characters in the Sitting Room of the Black Pheasant Inn, Grindle Moor, North Yorkshire, at Whitsuntide;

From German military characters who under all circumstances stand as stiffly and grimly erect as pokers, in contrast to British, Russian, French, and American military characters who invariably let themselves go and are comfortable;

From dog characters who, when brought onto the stage, fix their eyes on the audience and cynically keep them there until it is time for them to be led off;

From English characters of the "dry" polite comedian school whose unvaried, monotonous delivery makes an audience along toward ten o'clock pine for a good, old-fashioned, stimulating ham voice;

From irresistible seductress characters cast with middle-aged spinster actresses;

And, now once again, from soldier characters who return from the dead to visit their homes and who spend the evening in moist elocutionary pursuits —

May the theatre forevermore deliver us!

If we must have plays with these uniformed revenants, why can't we, if only for a change from this Kleiner species, have one in which there will be at least one loafer among the defunct who foresees that, if all the reports, scandalous, economic, and otherwise, are true, going back home as a ghost will be every bit as unhappy as going back alive and who will prefer to go to Atlantic City and have a little fun? It doubtless would not make the play much better, but it would be a relief.

It begins to look as if most playwrights never go to the theatre. Had Mr. Kleiner gone even once in a while he would have known that his theme was as stale as yesterday's bread and would have left it, to his profit, to the undertakers of such previous funerals as *Thunder In The Air*, *Miracle At Verdun*, *The Wind Is Ninety*, et al., none of which made their undertakers rich either.

Mr. Kleiner further has not learned that the more depressing a theme the more exalted must be the writing.

Otherwise, if it be as glumly poor as in this case, depression twice multiplied must be an audience's portion. Mr. Kleiner's writing relies for exaltation solely upon stage directions to flood his actors' faces with white lights. For the rest, it is of the routine and commonplace kind which pictures soldiers, in this instance paratroopers, in terms of lovingly addressing their dice in crap shooting games, waxing sex-conscious at sight of magazine photographs of undraped females, and indulging in a ceaseless stream of God-damns and sons-of-bitches. It is further the sort which indulges in locutions like "the touch of your soft mouth, the feel of your warm breasts," which elects a holiday cake illuminated by candles to merchant sentiment, which supercharges the sentiment with a child in bed listening to a good-night story, and which enjoys its comedy triumph in an Italian eating spaghetti.

The author's philosophy seems to be that the living eventually forget the dead, which we seem to have heard before.

The Motley settings were first-rate; the acting was third-rate; and Mr. Hargrave's direction contributed to the evening's pains by staging the exhibit as if the fliers, whether dead or alive, were members of an Olsen and Johnson troupe and as if much of the play itself were taking place in a football bleachers' cheering section.

## STATE OF THE UNION. NOVEMBER 14, 1945

*A play by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse. Produced by Leland Hayward for a run beyond the season in the Hudson Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

JAMES CONOVER	<i>Minor Watson</i>	SAM PARRISH	<i>Herbert Heyes</i>
SPIKE MC MANUS		SWENSON	<i>Fred Ayres Cotton</i>
	<i>Myron McCormick</i>	JUDGE JEFFERSON DAVIS	
KAY THORNDYKE	<i>Kay Johnson</i>	ALEXANDER	<i>G. Albert Smith</i>
GRANT MATTHEWS	<i>Ralph Bellamy</i>	MRS. ALEXANDER	<i>Maidel Turner</i>
NORAH	<i>Helen Ray</i>	JENNIE	<i>Madeline King</i>
MARY MATTHEWS	<i>Ruth Hussey</i>	MRS. DRAPER	<i>Aline McDermott</i>
STEVENS	<i>John Rowe</i>	WILLIAM HARDY	<i>Victor Sutherland</i>
BELLBOY	<i>Howard Graham</i>	SENATOR LAUTERBACK	
WAITER	<i>Robert Toms</i>		<i>George Lessey</i>

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *The study in James Conover's home in Washington, D. C.* Scene 2. *A bedroom in the Conover home. The following evening.* Act II. *The living-room of a suite in the Book-Cadillac Hotel, Detroit. Several weeks later.* Act III. Scene 1. *The living-room of the Matthews' apartment in New York. Two weeks later.* Scene 2. *The same. An hour later.*

Time. *The present.*

Director: *Bretaigne Windust.*

THERE ARE two ways to look at the play: the strictly critical, and the Broadway reviewing way. From the strictly critical it amounts to little. It is essentially and very largely a rewrite of the box-office species of plays that flourished in the bygone period of George Broadhurst and his *The Man Of The Hour* and of Belasco and his *The Woman* and *The Governor's Lady*. Anyone who recalls that period will recognize much that is familiar in the present exhibit: the man who enters politics with high ideals, who finds that crooked and self-seeking politicians would use him to their own ends, and who heroically tells them off and goes his independent and resolute way, along with the counterpoint of a wife whom his activities have brought him to

neglect, the other woman with whom he has become entangled, and his final discovery, after his wife has proved her mettle in public affairs, that it is she whom he has loved all along. The Messrs. Lindsay and Crouse utilize the old materials once again, neglecting not even the couple's sick child. Also, as in the plays of other days, they do not overlook the audience-tickling trick of sprinkling their utensil with the names of figures prominent in the news, a device then so popular that Lew Dockstader made a vaudeville fortune out of it. Nor have they omitted the old business of the suspicions of the wife consequent upon the other woman's leaving behind her a tell-tale fan, kerchief or corsage (in this instance a pair of spectacles), the scene in which a portly woman guzzles alcoholic liquor to comic effect, and such standard characters as the tip-hungry hotel bellboy, the brash newspaper reporter, the Southern judge named Jefferson David Something, the comedy maid, etc.

Much of their humor, furthermore, is of a scarcely convivial nature. Complains the hero's mistress, "I'll be sitting in New York while you'll be touring the country with your wife," whereupon the newspaper reporter wryly observes, "Politics makes strange bedfellows." The wife, rebuked by her husband for drinking at an important political dinner, retorts, "Personally, I'd rather be tight than President." Reminded in connection with her husband's sexual peccadillo that she has been reported to be friendly with a Major who has now been promoted to a General, the wife replies, "He may once have been my major interest, but my interest in him now is general." "Tell me," asks a woman of the Republican boss, "is there any difference between the Democrats and the Republicans?" to which the latter answers, "All the difference in the world; they're in and we're out."

The authors' political philosophy is not more verdant. It may be summed up in their conviction that "the people can get what they want; if people will only take an interest, they'll get what they're after." Their corollary is that it is the professional politicians who elect Presidents and that in the public and national good the people should take



over, an idea that may offer some slight skepticism to any member of the audience who chooses to reflect that if the people had followed the Messrs. Lindsay's and Crouse's injunction we probably should have been blessed with such unimpeachable White House masterminds, among others, as William Jennings Bryan, God forbid. The authors are also of the firm opinion that "the farmers aren't the bastards you think they are," but are the economically liberal and unselfish salt of the earth. And their richest eloquence in all directions is illustrated by their thematic curtain line: "You're all thinking about the next election instead of the next generation!"

So much for a quick critical glance.

As for, on the other hand, the Broadway reviewing gazebo, the playwrights have managed to manipulate the materials into a show which, in comparison with most of the preceding shows of the season, impresses a popular audience as being right out of the jewel-box. It has a surface air of being important; it is professionally slick in its mixture of solemnity and gags; it is ably directed by Mr. Windust, prettily set by Raymond Sovey, and in greater part ably cast and acted; and it fascinates the trade in making it imagine it is thinking: a combination operating to certain box-office profit.

The best performances are those of Minor Watson in the role of the realistic politician, Ruth Hussey as the wife, and Kay Johnson as the other woman. Ralph Bellamy's performance as the candidate for the Presidency often suggests a more plausible candidate for that office in Actors' Equity.

The *chef-d'œuvre* was awarded the Pulitzer prize.

## A SOUND OF HUNTING. NOVEMBER 20, 1945

*A play by Harry Brown. Produced by Irving L. Jacobs for 23 performances in the Lyceum Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

PFC. CHARLES COKE	<i>Frank Lovejoy</i>	PFC. KARL MULLER	
PFC. JOHN HUNTER	<i>James McGrew</i>		<i>Kenneth Brauer</i>
PVT. DINO COLLUCCI	<i>Sam Levene</i>	SGT. THOMAS CARTER	<i>Carl Frank</i>
T/5 FRANK DAGGERT	<i>William Beal</i>	PFC. MORRIS FERGUSON	
LT. ALLAN CRANE	<i>Charles J. Flynn</i>		<i>Ralph Brooke</i>
SGT. JOSEPH MOONEY		CAPT. JOHN TRELAWNY	
	<i>Burton Lancaster</i>		<i>Stacy Harris</i>
PFC. SAUL SHAPIRO	<i>George Tyne</i>	FREDERICK FINLEY	<i>Bruce Evans</i>

SYNOPSIS: Act I. *A January day, 1944. Very early in the morning.*  
Act II. *That afternoon.* Act III. *Later that afternoon.*

*The action of the play is in a war ruined house in the town of Cassino, Italy.*

Director: *Anthony Brown.*

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MR. BROWN, author of the commendable short war novel, *A Walk In The Sun*, and the Yank-published *Artie Greengroin* sketches, has written a play of considerable critical merit but one which unfortunately suffers in a commercial direction because of the time element. Now that the war is over, audiences give every indication of wishing to forget it, which, while probably not the wisest course from a future national point of view, is understandable from an immediate theatrical. After long daylight hours in which their newspapers and more inexhaustible friends and other bores have still had at them with one or another phase of the subject, they are possibly to be forgiven when night falls for desiring to divert themselves with some different topic. Eggs are all right for breakfast and maybe also, if you have a tolerance for them, for lunch; but when you are served them again, even in the form of mayonnaise, for dinner you are not overly to be blamed for heaving them at the waiter.

The most interesting element in the play is the highly accurate reporting — I am informed that it is highly accurate by those experienced in the matter — of the psychology, character, speech, and conduct of the soldiers who compose it. Brown, I am told, knew none of these things at first-hand. As a private in the Army, his activities were far removed from active service and the battlefield and were confined mainly to London, where he served with the Office of War Information. He obtained his materials, my informants confide, largely by frequenting Hyde Park and listening to soldier talk. This is certainly nothing against him. He proves that he was a good, sharp listener, as the trigger-eared Ring Lardner, who was not a prize-fighter or professional baseball player, proved it in another direction, and as Stephen Crane, who was no battlefield veteran, sufficiently proved it in still another. Brown is assuredly not in the class of either Lardner or Crane; I mention the point merely for the benefit of possible airy detractors.

This modern critical business of slighting a writer, however able he may be, because he has not engaged his materials at first-hand sometimes goes to undue and even ridiculous lengths. Henry James wrote of various things which were without his sphere of direct experience, yet wrote of them convincingly and very soundly. So did a variety of men like Balzac (*Adieu* and *El Verdugo*, for instance), Thomas Hardy (*The Hand of Ethelberta*), Zola (the remarkable *L'Assommoir*), and Joseph Conrad (the very frankly titled *Tales Of Hearsay*), among many others. It is the same in the case of drama. Consider, for example, in the way of characters Strindberg's *Simoom*, provincial Henry Arthur Jones' excursions into high life, or, for a flippant chuckle, Shaw's Mrs. Warren.

Brown's play, to call a halt to such fancy talk and return to the muttons, is his first dramatic effort and indicates a surprising feel for what is called theatre. From what would seem to be doubtful dramatic fuels, since their essence is watery from a stage viewpoint, he manages to derive a measure of suspense and evokes audience reaction to what in other hands might possibly be altogether static and dull.

The weakness of his exhibit in the immediate theatrical sense lies, paradoxically enough, in that selfsame accurate reporting to which earlier reference has been made. Plays with characters not dissimilar have already covered much the same ground and also with accurate reporting, some of it at first-hand, and an audience feels that it is listening to a thrice-told tale. Its interest is consequently not all that critically it should be.

Like others who through force of circumstances or choice have been removed from the theatre for some years, Brown has not known what has been going on in it while he was away. Whether it has been the war or Hollywood that has been responsible, aspiring playwrights have thus come into the theatre with wares which have been anticipated by playwrights who have remained on the scene. These others accordingly find themselves in the position of salesmen who excitedly ring the theatre's front door bell and try to sell its audience something, otherwise meritorious or maybe only a dramatic vacuum cleaner, of which the latter already has a closet-full.

Brown's contribution to the war play catalogue has a story simple to the point of tenuousness. A squad of American soldiers, caught in a bomb-devastated house in Italy during the invasion, miss one of their number who has been caught in turn in a dugout between them and a German gun nest. Though they are due to move on to another position, their corps spirit causes them to insist upon remaining until their colleague, whom none of them especially liked, is rescued. He is finally found dead, and they proceed to Naples. But simple as the narrative thread is, the playwright has woven it into a drama which, while intermittently and perhaps unavoidably a little monotonous, flowers with honest pathos and honest humor, and one which compared with its British all-male counterpart, *Journey's End*, is in its avoidance of sentimentality a relative masterpiece. Only once or twice, and then but briefly, as in the final scene wherein one of the soldiers lingers over a piece of fruit-cake reserved for his dead comrade and with a sad shake of the head leaves it undisturbed, does

Brown skirt the edges of that mawkishness which made the Sherrieff play rather sickening. And only in his caricatured war correspondent does his honesty fail him. He presents his other men forthrightly, and in all their physical, emotional, and conversational mud, and the picture is as un-theatrical and as real a one as the stage can well offer. The result is probably the best American war play since *What Price Glory?*

Among the arguments levelled against the play were its lack of "action" and the general familiarity of its soldier talk. The arguments were more argumentative, so to speak, than soundly critical. The play has quite as much action as Gorki's *Night Refuge*, Shaw's *Getting Married* and *Misalliance*, and a dozen or more equally interesting plays. That its soldier talk is basically familiar may be perfectly true. We have heard before, and often, the profanity, the sex, the complaints over food, the despair, and the rest of it. But we have not heard it reorchestrated with such life, such deep feeling, such humor, and such simple honesty.

There has also been some talk, accompanied by various elegant definitions, as to whether, after all, any such play may be listed in the category of dramatic Art. If and when the government adds to its personnel a Secretary of Culture and I am delegated to the post through the instrumentality of the eloquence of nobody in particular, my first official act will be an order peremptorily calling for the burning of any and all books, essays, and critiques containing disquisitions on Art, including my own. My act will be based upon an increasing conviction that such disquisitions have done more to make Art a term of contempt among the great masses of the people than any ten thousand Shakespearean hams the world over, and that their cremation will do more to promote a widespread appreciation of and enthusiasm for Art than anything that the human mind has yet been able to think up.

By way of preparation for my future office and public service I have lately reread no less than five dozen treatises which have exerted themselves in what their authors have deemed the one and only true definition of Art and, as a

sacrificial guinea pig, I wish to say that as a consequence I have been clinically infected with such a distaste for Art that it will, I fear, be some time before I recover.

The business of defining Art seems to have reached the proportions of the wholesale underwear business, and shows no signs of deteriorating. And since the definitions are as various and contradictory, and on the whole as dubious and confusing, as so many alleged cures for hay fever and Poland it is small wonder that most people are driven crazy by them and content themselves in saying to hell with the whole thing. The apostles of Art are, in short, its worst enemies. They have proudly explained it, in so far as the majority of persons are concerned, right into limbo.

No one esteems W. Somerset Maugham more highly than I do, but nevertheless one of the first books to go on the bonfire for its analysis of Art is his otherwise admirable *The Summing Up*. Thus, Maugham: "The value of Art, like the value of the Mystic Way, lies in its effects. If it can give only pleasure, however spiritual that pleasure may be, it is of no great consequence or at least of no more consequence than a dozen oysters and a pint of Montrachet. [Note. In *Cakes And Ale* it was Beauty that wasn't as satisfactory as a glass of cold beer. Willie is stealing from himself.] If it is a solace, that is well enough; the world is full of inevitable evils and it is good that man should have some hermitage to which from time to time he may withdraw himself; but not to escape them, rather to gather fresh strength to face them. For Art, if it is to be reckoned with as one of the great values of life, must teach man humility, tolerance, wisdom, and magnanimity. The value of Art is not beauty, but right action."

That our friend has here written some very pretty word music is not to be denied. But that he has not contributed further to the public befuddlement on the subject of what Art is and what it isn't is to be allowed, one fears, only by his one-eyed readers. The two-eyed will surely find themselves wildly chasing their tails trying to figure out, among other things, just how such hitherto recognized great Art as, say, the David of Michelangelo, the Ninth of Beethoven

and half the painting of Rembrandt can possibly be reckoned with as one of the values of life in view of its failure to meet Maugham's demand that it teach man humility, tolerance, wisdom, and magnanimity, singly or in combination.

To the flames next will be conveyed, in the interests of the public weal, T. S. Eliot's *The Sacred Wood* for this example of prime double-talk: "In a peculiar sense he (the poet) will be aware also that he must inevitably be judged by the standards of the past. I say judged, not amputated, by them; not judged to be as good as, or worse or better than, the dead; and certainly not judged by the canons of dead critics. It is a judgment, a comparison, in which two things are measured by each other. To conform merely would be for the new work not really to conform at all; it would not be new, and would therefore not be a work of Art. And we do not quite say that the new is more valuable because it fits in; but its fitting in is a test of its value — a test, it is true, which can only be slowly and cautiously applied, for we are none of us infallible judges of conformity. We say: it appears to conform, and is perhaps individual, or it appears individual, and may conform; but we are hardly likely to find that it is one and not the other." If the innocent bystander is not driven to forsake Art and marry Mae West on the spot after vainly trying to make head or tail out of such literary dialect, I am the wrong candidate for Secretary of Culture and they had better start looking around for another man at once.

The more the public is dosed up with such highfalutin stuff, the farther off is the day when few people will disagree with the late Kin Hubbard's Abe Martin that "classical music is the kind that we keep hopin' will turn into a tune." Consider, for another example, Komisarjevsky, whose *The Theatre* goes on the bonfire without delay if I have my way about it. "The unliterary theatre is the only genuine form of theatrical Art," pontificates Komy, who gallops on to observe that "the Art of the theatre is an Art of actors and directors and not of writers." Imagine the average man, hopeful of self-cultivation, not drooling at the mouth on

being inoculated with such balderdash. So the only genuine form of theatrical Art is not the literary theatre of anyone like Shakespeare, Molière or Shaw but the theatre of Owen Davis, Anne Nichols or Phoebe and Henry Ephron! So the only real and true form of theatrical Art is a stageful of competent actors competently directed in some dish of illiterate garbage like *Make Yourself At Home* or *Marriage Is For Single People*.

Bang next on the pyre goes George Santayana's *Obiter Scripta* for sending the public further on its way to the lunatic asylum with things like this: "To attempt to abstract a so-called æsthetic interest from all other interests and a so-called work of Art from whatever work ministers, in one way or another, to all human good, is to make the æsthetic sphere contemptible. . . . When creative genius neglects to ally itself in this way to some public interest it hardly gives birth to works of wide or perennial interest. Imagination needs a soil in history, tradition or human institutions, else its random growths are not significant enough, and, like trivial melodies, go immediately out of fashion." If all this is so, the average culture seeker after vainly scratching his head to the bone very likely asks how comes it then that the fine old rules of form, style and manner no longer in and of themselves count for anything; how comes it that, despite the Santayana dictum, the plays of men like Strindberg still have a wide and perennial interest; how comes it that trivial melodies like *I've Been Working On The Railroad*, *The Sidewalks of New York*, *Melancholy Baby*, and many others such have not gone immediately out of fashion?

If for no other reason than that it contains the definition, "Art, even the most realistic in method, is confession and abbreviation," Ludwig Lewisohn's *The Creative Life* will also be invited to visit the bonfire. The abbreviation end of the definition may pass muster. But the confession theory, that is, that the artist inevitably can not help betraying his psychological self in his work however much he may exercise himself to conceal it, offers considerable challenge to the future sanity of anyone trying to get the hang of the



whole Art business. The idea that such confession obtains in the case of numerous artists calls in the swallowing for a copious chaser of banana oil. Witness, for example, such exhibits as *The Cenci*, *Aïda*, *The Dark Flower*, *The Spectre's Bride* (Dvořák), and dozens of others.

Think of the disastrous effect upon the average man's mind when he reads such things as the Goncourts' "Art is the eternization in a supreme force absolute and definite of the fugitivity of a creature or of a human being." Picture his bewilderment, upon his eventual recovery, when he then runs across something like Catulle Mendès' "In the Art of painting no painting is equivalent to the invisible reverse of the canvas." Imagine his doubled perplexity when a little later he reads Taine's "Arts of design require a soil not too highly cultivated," de la Roque's "All the arts the end of which is not immediate reproduction of nature, such as music, poetry and architecture, owe their processes to physical laws the exactitude of which is mathematical," and Henry James' "Art is nothing more than the shadow of humanity." That his æsthetic soul may be saved, onto the bonfire all of them. And with them onto the bonfire in the great cause of Art Alexander Bakshy's *The Theatre Unbound*, wherein this morsel: "The theatre, if its object is real Art, must free itself of illusionism." And Magnard for his "Individually the Arts have produced so many masterpieces that they seem to be exhausted," to say nothing of his "There is no dramatic expression in the Art of music." And Alfred Stevens for his remarkable "Flies respect the Art of good painting," not to forget his hardly less remarkable "A badly built man was never a master in the plastic Arts." And Houssaye for his matchless "In the literary Art it is only bad books that are good for anything." And Saint-Gaudens for his "What garlic is to salad, insanity is to Art." And all kinds of others.

The wise words of Buckle provide our conclusion. "To look upon an acquaintance with literature as one of the objects of education," he said, "is to mistake the order of events and to make the end subservient to the means. It is because this is done that we often find what are called

highly educated men the progress of whose knowledge has been actually retarded by the activity of their education. We often find them burdened by prejudices, which their reading, instead of dissipating, has rendered more inveterate. For literature, being the depository of the thoughts of mankind, is full not only of wisdom but also of absurdities. The benefit, therefore, which is derived from literature will depend not so much upon the literature itself as upon the skill with which it is studied and the judgment with which it is selected."

Art or no Art, *A Sound Of Hunting*, even allowing for its palpable defects, is a good play. And its acting, by Levene, Tyne, Lancaster, Frank, and the rest of the company was as creditable as was its stage direction by Anthony Brown.

# MARRIAGE IS FOR SINGLE PEOPLE

NOVEMBER 21, 1945

*A comedy by Stanley Richards. Produced by Ruth Holden and Virginia Kronberg for 6 performances in the Cort Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

MRS. SIBYL HECUBA	Nana Bryant	LOTTIE DISENHOWER	
LILY PACKER	Florence Sundstrom		Gertrude Beach
REENA ROWE	Anne Francine	SPENCER SHILLING	Robert Sully
CYNTHIA MURDOCK		AN EXPRESSMAN	Sherman Lazarus
	Marguerite Lewis	REGINALD HECUBA	
DUDLEY PACKER	Frank Otto		Nicholas Saunders
KENNETH HECUBA	Joel Marston	A YOUNG LADY	Vivian Mallah
UNA	Nancie Hobbes		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. A spring evening. Shortly after dinner. Act II. Scene 1. The next day. Around noon. Scene 2. The next morning. About 3 o'clock. Act III. Late that afternoon.

The entire action of the play takes place in Reginald Hecuba's penthouse apartment in New York City.

Director: Stanley Logan.

A FUGITIVE from an infantorium, this was another of the incidents that pop up in every theatrical season for a reason no one can account for and that usually pop right out again for a reason anyone can account for.

One had capriciously imagined that the play about the plain, wide-eyed, little female yokel who winds up as a metropolitan heartbreaker and the toast of the rest of the cast had enjoyed its innings long years ago. Yet here it was again, and intrinsically the same as all of forty seasons back. The one or two embroideries with which the present second-hand clothesman embellished it could not conceal its shabbiness, and it stuck out at the elbows quite as it has in its numerous earlier paraphrases. Most of the habitual characters were once more in evidence and readily recognizable in their ingenuous disguises. To make matters just a little

more trying, the author lent a Hollywood flavor to his period piece by introducing a movie gossip columnist, a movie executive, and a movie actor, all supposedly very comical and all nothing of the kind. Even the usual comedy maid, who was something pretty terrible, seemed a relief. I have no faintest idea who this Mr. Richards is, but under the circumstances it is not a bad bet that his profession is writing for the pictures. If it isn't and I lose the bet, I'll retrieve my money by laying another that it will be in due course.

Mr. Richards is an ideal man for the job, as his play must have proved to even the most backward talent scout. He has no wit and fills in the absence of it with the brand of humor that in the minds of the film bosses should go big in Toledo, Ohio, and other such cultural capitals. He has little imagination and makes up for it by repeating in what he waywardly imagines to be fresh terms the already long deceased hokums of a long defunct stage. And his idea of climactic surprise in causing his heroine's fiancé to return from the South Pacific with a dusky female native on his arm is quite as saucily original as his Preston Sturges movie idea of naming his little heroine Lottie Disenhower. The idea, furthermore, that simple and artless feminine dress generally appeals to metropolitan males long inured to elaborate clothes-horses is hardly the playwright's own. It was expounded, and to the same purpose, some thirty-nine years ago by the late Charles Belmont Davis, brother to Richard Harding, in his tale, *The Most Famous Girl In New York*.

Most of the acting was as grievous as the direction by Stanley Logan, which was as grievous in turn as the stage setting by Frederick Fox.

There are two species of creatures that can not be taught new tricks: old dogs and, apparently, new theatrical producers like the twain here involved. Since dogs are not the immediate concern of this commentator, the attention turns to the novice producers. Evidently convinced that all one has to do to become a Frohman is to get hold of any kind of play and the money to put it on, these latter annually go through the necessary motions, proudly have their

names emblazoned on the house boards, don unaccustomed finery on the opening nights, and the next morning, upon reading the reviews, suffer violent internal pains. That is, all save two or three who are wont consolingly to reassure themselves that reviews do not always matter, and whose pains are deferred for perhaps a week or so. While the two or three must be admitted to be at least partly right as to the reviews, since every once in a while, as in the case of some such emission as *School For Brides*, the public pays no attention to them, it remains that in the particular case of the overwhelming majority of the plays which they and their fellow novices produce the public somehow strangely does happen to pay attention to them, with the aforesaid abdominal agonies the early result. A diagnosis of the reasons for those agonies is not too difficult.

Old or young, the tyros do not seem to realize that the theatre has grown up, if only a little, in the last twenty years and that the kind of plays which once satisfied audiences satisfy them no longer. Many of the scripts upon which they lavish their affection and their backers' money may have been suitable for the trade of other days, but they are scarcely so for that of today. Such scripts play down, albeit often without deliberation, to the audiences, if any, and treat them like hangovers from the past, and they properly resent it. If the tyros were to take the trouble to acquaint themselves with the later day stage they would appreciate that, with negligible exception, any really successful play allows that its audiences are fairly adult and no longer eat peanuts, like monkeys, during a performance.

Secondly, the tyros are as imitative as so many Cissie Loftuses and pattern their gambles after previous successful plays, to their regular, inevitable loss. This *Marriage Is For Single People* is just one illustration out of many. Thirdly, the virgins further fool themselves into believing that any play, however bad and whatever its fate, may be sold to the motion pictures for a sum that will either afford them a profit or, if the worst comes to the worst, will materially reduce their theatre losses. That they delude themselves becomes clear when one glances at the records and

finds that most of their exhibits have not drawn so much as a symptom of a picture bid and that, where one of them oddly has, the amount of money paid by the film people has been a drop in the bucket against the investment.

Finally, there is the yearning on the part of individuals whose knowledge of the theatre is nil to posture as producers by way of lifting themselves up a little from their lack-lustre trades, and getting their names in the papers, if even for a day, alongside those of the established producers, and pleasing the vanity of their wives and relatives, who can show off their new regalia, with the orchids on it, on the opening nights. Human nature is human nature, if often, all things considered, pretty expensive. In the directly previous season, twenty-nine out of the thirty plays and four out of the six musical shows produced by the innocents were costly failures. In the present season up to this chapter fifteen out of sixteen plays, including those of their experimental brothers and sisters, and four out of five musicals were equally costly failures. And the one musical exception, it may ironically be noted, was the reviewers' unanimously condemned and eminently atrabilious *Polonaise* which the public for a while somehow rebelliously patronized but which, even with pretty good trade, had not broken even at the conclusion of its New York or subsequent road run.

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 THE DAY BEFORE SPRING. NOVEMBER 22, 1945

*A musical comedy with book and lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner, music by Frederick Loewe. Produced by John C. Wilson for 165 performances in the National Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

KATHERINE TOWNSEND		JOE McDONALD	<i>Don Mayo</i>
	<i>Irene Manning</i>	HARRY SCOTT	<i>Robert Field</i>
PETER TOWNSEND	<i>John Archer</i>	EDDIE WARREN	
BILL TOMPKINS	<i>Bert Freed</i>		<i>Dwight Marfield</i>
MAY TOMPKINS	<i>Lucille Benson</i>	CHRISTOPHER RANDOLPH	
ALEX MAITLAND	<i>Bill Johnson</i>		<i>Patricia Marshall</i>
MARIE	<i>Karol Loraine</i>	KATHERINE (in the book)	
LUCILLE	<i>Bette Anderson</i>		<i>Mary Ellen Moylan</i>
LEONORE	<i>Lucille Floetman</i>	ALEX (in the book)	<i>Hugh Laing</i>
MARJORIE	<i>Estelle Loring</i>	VOLTAIRE	<i>Paul Best</i>
SUSAN	<i>Arlounine Goodjohn</i>	PLATO	<i>Ralph Glover</i>
ANNE	<i>Betty Jean Smythe</i>	FREUD	<i>Hermann Leopoldt</i>
GERALD BARKER	<i>Tom Helmore</i>		

Scenes. *The Harrison College campus and environs.*

Time. *The present.*

Director: *John C. Wilson.*

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THOUGH MY CRITICAL conscience frequently whispered in my ear, "Come, come, dope, be yourself," I had a pleasant time at the show. At least I had a pleasant time until a pair of Antony Tudor's ballets horned in. The pair are not only pestilent as ballets but so silly in their alleged picturing of two periods in the life of the show's heroine that even the most rabid balletomane, than whom no greater imbecile exists, would laugh at them. I shall not go into detail about them. I shall simply inquire how I may be expected to imagine that the reserved heroine is in turn imagining that she is visualizing herself and her staid lover when she and her lover, neither of whom apparently has ever danced a step, are impersonated by two abnormally dissimilar specimens who interpret them by hoofing like all blazes and throwing each other cyclonically over their shoulders. I am able at

times, like any other hospitable reviewer, to suspend judgment, but in the present case I'd need the assistance of the men who built the San Francisco-Oakland bridge.

What gave me pleasure were several things, though in other directions critical conscience was hardly to be denied. It was a relief to have a show built around a simple American love story, even if the story was borrowed in part from Molnár's *The Fable Of The Wolf*, last performed here in 1914 as *The Phantom Rival*, and in other part from Sacha Guitry's *Let's Dream*, seen here as *Sleeping Partners* a little later. After a succession of exhibits in which various amorous composers, Austrian royalty, Polish military heroes, and other such excerpts from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* uniformly conduct themselves pretty much as if they were one and the same man, and that man a half-wit, any such intelligently sentimental and unheroic love story seems a *coup de maître*.

It was additionally gratifying at last to see a show about young people staged with a reasonable resemblance to youth in real life. What we ordinarily get are young people who act as if their mothers had been scared at birth by Eva Tanguay and whose fathers were given to going on benzedrine benders with George Abbott and the Wallenda circus troupe. In this show one of the young people even sits for a moment on a chair. It was wonderful. Also pleasing is a heroine in the attractive person of Irene Manning whose singing is not accompanied by any of that predaceous Broadway cuteness with which many musical show actresses in their late thirties and early forties hope to pass themselves off for Margaret O'Brien in diapers. Also a shapely saucebox named Patricia Marshall who can render a naughty ditty without grinning it gratuitously into any further double meaning. Also John Archer who can play a straight musical show role without the usual suggestion that his trousers should be tights. And also and above all the modesty and taste with which the stage for the most part has been handled.

On the other hand, there is considerably less delight in contemplating that the author of the book has missed many



opportunities for satire and humor and that, as a consequence, his otherwise agreeable story is sometimes inclined to monotony. The show deals with the ten year reunion of a college class of 1935, but some of Mr. Loewe's music which figures in it is obviously an alumnus of very much older vintage. There are moments when it seems that Lehár, Kollo, Eysler and certain other such old grads are hanging around the campus, and when a Mexican gate-crasher is offering a paraphrase of "Deep In My Heart" as a class song. And the chorus girls provide the best argument against co-education yet heard. Nevertheless, if one treats one's critical conscience to a couple of drinks — and maybe eight or ten very stiff ones in the case of those ballets — a very fair time may be had, even if one idly wonders where the author got the idea, in the scene wherein Plato advises his beset heroine, that Platonic love means quite what he seems to think it does. And even if most of the usually commendable Miles White's costumes look as if they had been designed by Tony Pastor.

The before-mentioned Miss Manning, according to the playbill, was antecedently recruited to the films because of her extended reputation as an accomplished singer in light opera. As a commentary on Hollywood, I quote how Hollywood took advantage of her operatic competences: "She promptly found herself in horse opera, the damsel in dimity who made Gene Autry ride harder and shoot straighter. Comforted by a three-year contract, she progressed into a powder-burnt underworld as a moll to Humphrey Bogart."

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THE FIRST WIFE. NOVEMBER 27, 1945

*A play by Pearl Buck. Produced by the Chinese Theatre for 12 performances, originally in the Barbizon-Plaza Theatre.*

## CAST

Allen Young, Wang Yung, Marian Chang, Alice Chan, Chiao-chin Fang, Clark Chin, Harry Yorku, and Chong Spelvin.

Directors: *H. Lee Heagy and Wang Yung.*

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MRS. BUCK's talents remain in the novel form. Her venture into drama is far from fortunate. Hoping to write a play that would show the conflicts between the old and the new orders in China and embodying the conflicts in a young Chinese's return to his old-school family after a protracted period of study in America, she has produced only a supine reading-room treatise, without either inner or superficial theatrical stimulation, without dialogic facility, and without the slightest Occidental audience interest. Her thematic conclusion, following her protagonist's decision to rid himself of his wife and daughter lest they interfere with his career, is that the old and new generations in China are separated by an unbridgeable gulf, which, at least in her treatment, assumes a ring as hollow as a struck wooden jug.

The play was performed in English by a company of Chinese, among them Wang Yung, said to be a popular stage and screen actress in her native land. Miss Yung is agreeable to the eyes, but hardly yet a candidate for honors on the American stage. The others were similarly unlikely from a Western point of view.

Mrs. Buck laid herself open to facetious criticism by permitting one of her players to be listed as Chong Spelvin. One doesn't do such things in connection with a serious effort. Perhaps it provides a clue to her personal suspicions as to the merit of the entire undertaking.

## THE MERMAIDS SINGING. NOVEMBER 28, 1945

*A comedy by John van Druten. Produced by Alfred de Liagre, Jr., for 53 performances in the Empire Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

CLEMENT WATERLOW	Walter Abel	LUTHER CUDWORTH	Jack Manning
GEORGE	Arthur Griffin	AN ELDERLY GENTLEMAN	
BERTHA CORRIGAN	Lots Wilson		Wallace Widdecombe
THAD GREELIS	Walter Starkey	A WAITER	Leon Forbes
DEE MATTHEWS	Beatrice Pearson	A DRUNK	Frank Lyon
MRS. JAMES	Jane Hoffman	A GIRL	Dina Merrill
MRS. MATTHEWS	Frieda Inescort	A MAN	David Van Winkle
PROFESSOR JAMES	Harry Irvine		

**SYNOPSIS:** *The action passes in any large American city, other than New York. Act I. Scene 1. The living-room of a suite in the best hotel. Late Monday night. Scene 2. The same. Some hours later. Act II. Scene 1. A corner of the hotel bar. Tuesday lunch time. Scene 2. Mrs. Matthews' house. Friday evening. Scene 3. A corner of the bar. Late Friday night. Act III. Scene 1. The park. Early Saturday morning. Scene 2. Same as Act I. Late Saturday afternoon.*

Director: John van Druten.

**I**N A DAY when our several formerly amusing polite comedy writers have turned into political and sociological physicians, it is good to have one like van Druten remain true to first principles and to get from him still, however variable may be their quality, comedies that are content to be comedies and not exercises in cosmic therapeutics. The happy day when Sally Trevor found in Bruce Devereux a likelier lover than her husband Lester, who more or less wittily let it go at that, seems otherwise to have vanished from our stage. What we generally up to this time have been getting instead is something like this:

*Sally:* Lester, I no longer love you as I once did. My heart and all of me is Bruce's. I hope you will forgive me, dear, but there's no more I can say.

*Lester:* But do you realize the consequences? Individuals are like nations. I need you. Under the same circumstances, would America desert an England who needs her for a Russia that does not? Our personal peace is not different from the world's peace, which we Americans must all strive to secure and maintain. The fabric of peace is like our own fabric. Then there is the question of economics. Bruce can not distinguish between the fiscal principles of Communism and Democracy, and could not, would not, think it his duty to support you. Communism says, "Share and share alike." Democracy, the only good and true government for the peoples of this earth, on the other hand demands that I supply the bread and butter for my wife. You, too, Sally, are a member of the great, human Democracy; you must not share your love and funds with Bruce. Furthermore, my dear, let us not forget that, like the United Nations, we must remain united; otherwise there will be catastrophe. If you leave me for Bruce, it would be like the United States, our own glorious country, leaving the United Nations on behalf of Iran, where the greed of Communism versus Capitalism in controlling oil concessions threatens the peace of the East, where the machinations to get control of iron, coal, copper, lead, manganese, borax, nickel and cobalt threatens the potential peace of Europe, and where Revolution must go and Democracy enter if the dreams of a Washington and Jefferson — yes, of a Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt — are to come true!

Where presently we often get something like that, in the past we have regularly got, chiefly from visiting Englishmen like Coward, comedies of deranged sex which have seemed to be much as follows:

#### *Cast*

LORD DEREK, a hermaphrodite

THE DUKE OF MINTINGTON, his father, an Onanist

THE DUCHESS, his mother, a Lesbian

DAFENE, his sister, a flagellant

LADY VI TWYNING, his sister's friend, an auto-eroticist with tribade tendencies

TEWKS, his manservant, a homosexual and transvestist

HOSKINS, his butler, an exhibitionist with Undinist proclivities

*Scene. Lord Derek's flat in Charles Street, Mayfair. Lork Derek, the Duke, the Duchess, Daphne and Lady Vi have just finished dinner.*

*Derek*

I say, mother darling, you *are* a bitch, aren't you, my sweet?

*The Duchess*

Don't let your dear father, the lovable bastard, overhear you saying that, my pet. You know how finical he is: *finical de siècle*, as dear Lady Lavatoire was saying wittily only yesterday at the dear Countess's.

*(Enter Hoskins. He serves cognac, V.V.S.O.P., languidly setting a flame to each glass with a pink taper.)*

*Daphne*

Who were at the Carlton, Claridge's, the Berkeley, the Ritz, Boulestin's, Quaglino's, Taglioni's and the Embassy at lunch?

*Lady Vi*

Tony and Gerald were having lunch together, Cecil and Neville were at another table, Geoffrey and Ivor were together at another, young Lord Bellaver was lunching with young Lord Ferraby, Giles Fenwick was in a corner with Bramleigh Hutchinson, Robin St. Vincent had Ronnie Fay with him, and young Lord Crawley was with Freddie Finch — and Margot and Lady Lacey, Auriol and Beryl, Rosamond and Connie, Phyllis and Gladys, Leona and Zaza Potter, Gwen and Lady Maudlestone were together at other tables.

*The Duke (under his breath)*

Acidulous tart! *(Aloud)* I say, Derek, have you seen the Duke of Southminster lately?

*Derek*

I adore him! *(He goes to the piano, seats himself and plays very passionately.)*

*(Enter Tewks)*

*Tewks*

Will you wear the magenta silk pajamas tonight, sir, or shall I lay out the jade ones with the jacinth monogram?

*Lady Vi*

My God, Derek, don't tell me that you are turning masculine — in these days!

*Derek*

Worm!

*Lady Vi*

If you are alluding to yourself, my dear, aren't you paying a somewhat exaggerated compliment to your *foudre anatomique*?

*(Derek, in a frenzy of indignation, smashes a Louis Quatorze vase.)*

*The Duchess*

I think I shall motor to Juan les Pins Thursday. I promised dear Maribelle —

*The Duke*

I think I shall motor to Antibes Thursday. I promised dear François —

*Derek (wildly)*

Shut up! Shut up, for God's sake, all of you! I shall want the Rolls on Thursday as I promised Dickie Tolliver I'd spend the week-end with him at Cannes!

*Daphne (looking at Lady Vi significantly)*

Let's stay right here, darling, just us two, cozy and comfy-like.

*Lady Vi*

Why not stay on with us, Duchess? London can be exciting at this time of the year.

*Derek (adjusting a bloom to his lapel  
and speaking to himself)*

Love: the refuge of the unimaginative. Marriage: the diversion of the bourgeoisie. Children: the offspring of offshoots of Darwinian philosophy. Women: — *(his epigrammatic virtuosity fails him for the moment and he returns*

*to the piano and plays an imitation of an imitation of a Viennese waltz.)*

*Lady Vi*

Charming, pet. What is it?

*Derek*

A little thing I dashed off myself. I call it "When It's Pansy Time in Capri."

*Hoskins (to Tewks)*

Sweet, aren't it?

*Tewks*

Delicious, say I.

*(They covertly hold hands.)*

*The Duchess*

Every time I think of the dear Principessa in one of those dreadful marble bathrooms at the Prince de Galles, I shudder.

*The Duke*

It is the same with me whenever I think of the dear Earl eating those stale pâtés at Foyot's — Pâté's farewell tour, I call them. *(All break down utterly and roar with laughter.)*

*Daphne (lighting a cigarette)*

Life is one long convulsive sequence of ups and downs.

*Derek (madly)*

Sex, sex, sex, always sex: — I sicken of it!

*Lady Vi*

The world has its morals, its poor little morals, its droll little morals, its puny little morals, and we have ours. Who shall say which is right?

*Derek*

Rather macabre, I call it. But you're a clever little dear, that's what you are — a clever little dear!

*Daphne*

Rather macabre, I call it.

*The Duke*

*Rath-er!*

*The Duchess*

Stop it! Stop it! Else I shall go mad! (*She vaults over the sofa and takes Daphne and Lady Vi in her arms*)

*The Duchess*

In Lauterbach hab' ich mein' Strumpf verloren.

*Daphne (archly)*

What does that mean?

*The Duchess*

"Cheerio," in French.

*Derek (impassionedly smashing another vase)*

Illusion! What the world needs is a recapture of illusion. Without it, the human race — the human race that has slid back into the slime — the slime that has got into all our eyes and ears and minds and on all our evening clothes — the human race will perish. It has invented inventions, it has invented still more inventions, and has it progressed? It has slid back into the slime — the slime that has got into our hair and nostrils and souls. No more illusions, only a wet, damp fog that obscures all, everything! Civilization is lost, all is lost in the slime — the slime that has got into our beings, into our noses, into our eyelashes. But this dear old England that we all love will wriggle through. Come, all of you.

(*Derek, the Duke, the Duchess, Daphne, Lady Vi, Tewks and Hoskins all go to bed together.*)

*Curtain*

Van Druten has sedulously avoided not only political and sociological comedy but, though he treats of sex, any such gestures in pseudo-fashionable depravity. It is good, too, to have with us still a writer who, if very far indeed, in the O'Casey phrase, from "making gold embroidery out of dancing words," at least abjures the tongue of Broadway and plays with words as if with smooth marbles. And it is good, as well, to have a writer of sex comedy possessed of some demulcent wisdom and critical humor in place of the more usual sentimentality in cynical falseface.



I had thought that, if anyone dug up again the herein-before derisively alluded to play about the middle-aged man who with a coy lack of self-conviction implies to the young girl who has fallen in love with him that he is old enough to be her father, I would, to put it mildly, wish that I had remained at home. But van Druten now brings it on for what must be the fiftieth time and, because it is van Druten who has brought it on, I find it, not to my entire shock, a most engaging evening in the theatre. For the man who here writes it bequeaths to it many of those qualities of intelligence, experience, and literary and emotional grace which have been noted as being his attributes, and converts it for me, if apparently not for most of my colleagues, into an ingratiating occasion.

The price van Druten pays today for having written in *The Voice Of The Turtle* a comedy that appeals to everybody is critical detraction for having written in *The Mermaids Singing* an almost equally diverting comedy that appeals only to the few. Whatever its other merits or demerits, Broadway reviewing, though it may not always be conscious of it, is inoculated with the bacteria of the popular point of view. And it is thus, I think, that the particularized appeal of his latest play has taken its price of its sound critical virtues. It may be that the play is without that superficial action beloved of the majority of theatregoers. It may be that it is largely conversational. And it may be that its basic materials are overly familiar. But the same Broadway-minded defects are the portion of Brieux's *The Incubus*, one of the best of modern sex comedies, and, as for me, I would rather have *The Incubus* than nine-tenths of all the successful Broadway sex comedies ever written and, though it is not critically to be compared with it, this *The Mermaids Singing* above any other, save only the same author's *The Voice Of The Turtle*, that has shown up in some years.

The subject of sex, to be prosperous on Broadway, must generally be handled either sensationally or with the brand of sentiment that reflects more or less exactly the audience's own. Intelligence and sharp insight may not necessarily make it unpalatable, but they are likely to make it dull for

the mass of theatregoers who, posture as they will, find satisfactory diversion not in a playwright's exercise of his mind but rather in his exercise of his characters' bodies. One like van Druten, whose mental processes in this case are superior to those of his auditors, is not apt to be affectionately welcomed. Whom the gods of the theatre would critically destroy, to paraphrase Mencken, they first make popular.

Van Druten's comedy, which has a third act that wears a little thin after the preceding superior acts, is a contemplation of adultery in its various aspects. The contemplation, resourceful in its sound common sense filtered through wit, humor, and intelligent emotion, is draped upon the peg of a young girl who meets a celebrated playwright, married and the father of two daughters, falls in love with him, and offers herself to him. Through these twain and subsidiary characters the author ventilates his ideas, and not only his ideas on sex but, also very pointedly, his amused critical contempt for those of his contemporaries who burden their own comedies with propaganda of one kind or another.

The direction by the author was, as usual, commendable. The settings by Raymond Sovey were attractive. The acting honors went to Beatrice Pearson, who invested the young girl's role with a full charm and conviction. As for Walter Abel in the role of her wayward admiration, an actor of more manner, ease, and feminine appeal-would probably have improved the play's chances. Mr. Abel's performance seemed to belong more in a lumber yard than in any such fluid comedy.

## STRANGE FRUIT. NOVEMBER 29, 1945

*A dramatization by Lillian Smith, with the assistance of Esther Smith, of the former's novel of the same title. Produced by José Ferrer for 60 performances in the Royale Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

A MILL HAND	Murray Hamilton	NONNIE ANDERSON	Jane White
ANOTHER MILL HAND		BESS ANDERSON	Dorothy Carter
	Robert Daggett	JACKIE	Juan Jose Hernandez
ED ANDERSON	George B. Oliver	HENRY MCINTOSH	Earl Jones
LITTLE MISS NOBODY	Doris Block	SALAMANDER	Hanson W. Elkins
PREACHER DUNWOODIE		CHUCK	Ralph Meeker
	Stephen Chase	MISS SADIE	Mary Fletcher
TOM HARRIS	Ralph Theadore	MISS BELLE	Esther Smith
DEE CASSIDY	Ted Yaryan	MAMIE MCINTOSH	Edna Thomas
GABE	Alonzo Bosan	TRACY DEEN (AS A CHILD)	
DOUG	Jay Norris		Peter Griffith
HARRIET HARRIS	Eugenia Rawls	HENRY MCINTOSH (AS A CHILD)	
CHARLIE HARRIS	Francis Letton		Richard W. Williams
TRACY DEEN	Melchor Ferrer	A LITTLE GIRL	Phyllis De Bus
CRAZY CARL	Robinson Stone	LAURA DEEN (AS A CHILD)	
ALMA DEEN	Vera Allen		Betty Lou Keim
SAM PERRY	Juano Hernandez	TEN MCINTOSH	Ken Renard
LAURA DEEN	Charlotte Keane	A COLORED MAN	Ellsworth Wright
TUT DEEN	Frank Tweddell	A MAID	Doris Block
CORPORAL	Herbert Junior		

*The action of the play takes place in Maxwell, Georgia.*

*Director: José Ferrer.*

THE PLAY is clearly the work of a novice in dramaturgy and accordingly misses what effect the novel had. Yet were it a play infinitely better it would still not seem so in the production here accorded it. Mr. Ferrer has staged it in so monotonous a manner, has pitched its tone for the most part so low, and has allowed it so much inaudibility that there are moments when the audience does not know whether it is itself or the actors who are asleep. In such waking moments as there are, it further can not make out,

what with the stagehands' thunderous backstage racket, if what it is seeing is a dramatization of *Strange Fruit* or a revival of *Shenandoah*. Considering the doldrums of the exhibit in the more frequent other moments, it probably might not have been a bad idea to have the actors and stagehands change places.

Being unacquainted with the accepted principles of dramaturgy, the author and her sister assistant have deemed it sufficient to snip sections out of the novel and spread them upon a stage with no fusion, no direction, and no cumulation. A scene begins and ends, another scene begins and ends, still another begins and ends. There is little bridging; a dramatic whole is non-existent. A character observes, "It's getting late; I must go" — and the scene curtain falls. Later, another character observes, "It's getting late; I must go" — and the scene curtain again falls. But though it assuredly gets to be late so far as the play is concerned, the characters, though they duly go, do not seem to go anywhere that furthers the dramatic action.

The story, as is doubtless recalled, is of the love of a weak-willed young Southerner for a Negro girl, of the child she bears him, of the local forces that bring him to abandon her and cause him to bribe his Negro houseboy to marry her, of his murder by the girl's brother, and of the lynching of the houseboy who is thought to be guilty of the crime. In the novel, the story takes on a degree of shape, movement, and vitality. But in the play it loses all trace of them and is resolved into a commonplace melodrama passed off as a serious study of racial inequality by playing it as if it were something by Tolstoy and incorporating into its final scene a harangue on the South's injustice to the black man. The plot, which is scarcely burdened with novelty, obviously has a certain automatic appeal. But that appeal is minimized in the present instance by the author's patent calculation, which ultimately dissipates proper reaction through a protracted awareness of the blue-print nature of her prospectus.

Another defect in the play is the author's effort to embody and reflect in it the entire life of the town in which

its action is laid. Her stage at times is consequently so crowded with dramatically extraneous bit players that one is momentarily confused into imagining that what is going on is Elmer Rice's *Street Scene* with its locale transferred from New York to Maxwell, Georgia. Had she been more experienced in the ways of drama, she would have realized that the least effective manner in which to catch the essence and spirit of a town or community is to show too much in too many scenes with too many people. That way lies only old Augustin Daly gallery melodrama, and worse.

Despite the seeming critical belief that it requires a considerable genius to depict any such town or community in dramatic microcosm, the business has been frequently negotiated by playwrights of varying competence. All that it requires, apparently, is a playwright who appreciates that economy is the first rule of dramatic authorship. From the day of *Rip Van Winkle* to the later day of *Our Town* we have seen the trick accomplished and, whatever the quality of the plays themselves, accomplished effectively. It has been only when economy has been forgotten, as in such plays as *The American Way* and this *Strange Fruit*, that failure has resulted. It remains that the best way in the end to maneuver the microcosm is by dramatic ellipsis, implication, suggestion, and symbol. It is thus that one is brought to see and feel and know a community in its entirety in, say, a *Shadow And Substance* and, immeasurably more so, in a masterpiece like *The Plough And The Stars*. It remains the worst way to bring on platoons of bit players and supers, to change the scene every ten minutes, and to write a *The Streets Of New York*.

Though we now have had our quota of plays arguing a place of equality for the Negro in a white man's world, there is no good critical reason why we should not have still more, provided only they depart what has become largely dramatic formula and cultivate somewhat fresher dramatic ground. We know perfectly well by this time that the South fails to give the Negro a fair deal, that violent prejudice in that and other parts of the country operate to his grave detriment, that lynching is a thoroughly odious and hateful

practice and should be got rid of, etc., etc. While it may possibly be true that these things can not elsewhere be stated too often, their restatement in the theatre, and usually in much the same terms, becomes tiresome and rids their justice of much of the prayed for response. There must certainly be newer and more imaginative ways to handle the theme and to inculcate in audiences, if that be the purpose, real sympathy for the Negro. At least one such way is to be found in the outline and first act of a play which Sherwood Anderson had completed before his lamented death. A contrast, admirably imagined, between the lives, philosophies, attitudes, and morals of blacks and whites, it presents a picture potentially rich in dramatic and theatrical possibilities, and one which might sing its theme, instead of shouting it in the current manner, into an audience's emotions.

The settings which George Jenkins contrived for the Smith exhibit were atmospherically interesting. In the acting department, Juano Hernandez in the role of an understanding Negro doctor came off much the best. Melchor Ferrer as the white protagonist went in for altogether too much attitudinizing, probably a hangover from his directly previous Hollywood activities. As his colored love, Jane White, making her professional stage debut, offered an engagingly gentle personality but indicated the need for considerable more experience, particularly in the matter of vocal pitch and control.

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 THE FRENCH TOUCH. DECEMBER 8, 1945

*A comedy by Joseph Fields and Jerome Chodorov. Produced by Herbert H. Harris for 33 performances in the Cort Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

PATARD	John Regan	GEORGETTE	Louise Kelley
ROUBLARD	Brian Aherne	NANETTE	Mary Cooper
GISELLE ROUBLARD	Jacqueline Dalya	TOTO	Richard Bengalt
SCHWARTZ	William Malten	MARCEL	John Graham
FELIX VON BRENNER	John Wengraf	ROBERT	Stewart Stern
JACQUELINE CARLIER	Arlene Francis	MADELEINE	Sara Strengell
BOUCOT	Ralph Simone	ODETTE RENOUX	Madeleine Le Beau
HENRI	Jerome Thor	REINER	Dave Hyatt

*SYNOPSIS: The scene of the play is the Theater Roublard in Paris, spring of 1943. Act I. Scene 1. Early afternoon. Scene 2. Evening: four weeks later. Act II. Scene 1. The following evening. Scene 2. Three weeks later. Scene 3. The following day.*

Director: René Clair.

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THE FRENCH TOUCH, aside from a poster resembling Sacha Guitry stuck on the scenery, is confined to the comedy's title. So far as Gallic tone otherwise goes, the Messrs. Fields and Chodorov might quite as aptly have called their play *Is Zat So?*, notwithstanding it contains considerably more Broadway profanity. The lithograph of Guitry, who was plainly the inspiration (to overtax the term) of the comedy, alone reflects anything distantly like French atmosphere. Even the poster adjoining it designating the name of the Paris playhouse in which the action passes has the word "theatre" faultily accented, and the drop curtain showing the Arc de Triomphe might seriously disturb a Cook's tourist.

The authors, though they have missed dramatically in many and more important directions and have written a totally unimaginative and crippled play, are nevertheless at least partly to be sympathized with. Any American at-

tempt to duplicate the French comedy tone and manner is threatened with difficult hurdles. The language is only one. What sounds delicate in French often sounds harsh in English, and more so in English-American. There is, for general example, all the aural difference in the world between "mistress" and "belle amie," and "go to hell" shocks the ear where "va-t'en" more gently massages it. When the present playwrights use the word "lousy," among others such, it is to be feared that the hoped for French flavor of their exhibit thus further resolves itself into a bouquet more remindful of Pat's Clam House. The softer French synonym would be "pouilleux" or, far less literally and more saucily in the Guitry kind of comedy which they tried to write, something like, say, "aux oignons." Their dissonant "comfort station" would be the more assonant "châlet de nécessité"; their corrosive "bitch," the more fluent "femelle."

Another hurdle is the prejudice of the American theatre against what the late Charles Frohman called "smile comedies" which, he rightly contended, were usually doomed to failure with audiences, who insistently demanded laughs. The American author with his eyes on the box-office — I am not speaking of the superior playwright — thus, as in this case, sets himself to wrestle with a theme where the French author would flirt with it. A Guitry, upon whose amorous and theatrical activities this comedy is patterned, would have blown bubbles with it, as indeed in one phase or another he already has, where the present playwrights have blown bellows.

But where these present playwrights have fumbled worse is in the play within their play. By way of tricking the Nazis who have taken over Paris, their French actor-playwright protagonist agrees to the command to perform a play, to be written by himself, which shall testify to the good relations between the French and the Germans. Yet so fancyless are the Messrs. Field and Chodorov that all they can think up as revenge for him is to have him incorporate the cry, "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity," into his play's conclusion. What an audience surely has a right to expect is the more subtle invention of a play that might deceive the Nazi officials in



superficial theme but one whose cannily maneuvered undertones and overtones would ridicule and play the fool with them. Not a completely new idea, I appreciate; the fundamental scheme has been used before; but one that is sorely needed to lift even a little an otherwise all too flat occasion.

The presentation in its entirety, save only for a well contrived set by George Jenkins picturing the stage and boxes of a French theatre, a first-rate performance by John Wengraf as the Nazi minister of culture, and an at least moderately serviceable if too unsparingly grinfu! one by Arlene Francis as the first of the actor hero's three wives, was calamitous. The casting of the English actor, Brian Aherne, who hasn't an ounce of comedy in his equipment, for the Guitry role was apparently based on the theory that a handsome actor, however ill-suited to a part, will draw the female trade in droves, a theory which presupposes that the women of today are as swoony in that direction as those of forty and fifty years ago. Mr. Aherne, aside from his physical attributes, otherwise tendered a performance which seemed to be limited to an extensive, prismatic, and very intense trousseau. As wives two and three, a pair of motion picture girls, the Misses Dalya and Le Beau, contented themselves with making a variety of faces, some of them pretty enough but all probably more relevant to a camera than to a dramatic stage. And the direction by René Clair, a cinema cock of the walk, suffered acutely from what the psychiatrists know as poriomania.

Before the play opened, Mr. Chodorov gave out an interview in which he thus unburdened his soul: "Why should I bat my brains out working for the stage? In Hollywood I am handsomely paid and needn't care too much whether a script is a masterpiece or not. In Hollywood there is a place for submasterpieces. On the stage it's a bull's-eye or nothing. It's harder work, financially a greater gamble, and there's always a good chance of having your teeth kicked in by the Broadway critics into the bargain. Where's the percentage?"

The percentage for playwrights like Mr. Chodorov is quite clearly in Hollywood.

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## BRIGHTEN THE CORNER. DECEMBER 12, 1945

*A farce by John Cecil Holm. Produced by Jean Dalrymple for 29 performances in the Lyceum Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

OPAL HARRIS	<i>Dulcie Cooper</i>	TOWNSEND MARSHALL, LT. U.S.N.
JERI CARSON	<i>Phyllis Avery</i>	<i>Gene Blakely</i>
NEIL CARSON	<i>George Petrie</i>	DELIVERY BOY <i>Paul Stanley</i>
DELL MARSHALL	<i>Lenore Lonergan</i>	OFFICER ROBERTSON <i>Robert Simon</i>
JEFFREY Q. TALBOT	<i>Charles Butterworth</i>	

SYNOPSIS: Act I. *Early evening in September.* Act II. *Much later the same night. Daybreak, in fact.* Act III. *Later that morning.*

*The living-room and outer hall of the Carsons' upper East Side apartment in New York City. The time is the present.*

Director: *Arthur O'Connell.*

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MR. HOLM here reproduces the farce which could regularly be counted on back in the far days when musical comedies generally opened with a chorus of peasants and when any reference in either to anyone having come from Brazil was greeted with exceptional merriment. To wit, the one about the rich uncle who inopportunistically shows up in the household of his newly married nephew just when a quarrel has caused the latter's wife to leave him and who mistakes a visiting young woman for her, leading to the natural embarrassments when it comes time for the couple to go to bed. Mr. Holm may be said not to be exasperatingly progressive.

In the farce of a half-century ago, uncle was always either a highly irascible old fellow or a gay dog given to the bottle and to pinching the parlor maid, but in both cases ever equipped with a fat checkbook ready to exercise itself when and if the nephew and his wife had a baby, which of course would gratefully be named for him. In this version, uncle is a somewhat milder creature, but otherwise wholly true to type, including the penchant for alcoholic liquor. The

other characters are similarly cut out of the old cloth, and the plot maneuvering, stage business, and humor are snipped with the same scissors. Most of the audience thus knows that, after a wild night, uncle will show up tight and with his arms full of night club souvenirs, and that the hypothetical wife who has been forced to make the rounds with him will also be inebriated, will kick off her slippers, and — significantly pointing to her stepped-on foot — will groan that the friend whom he induced her to dance with “made a big impression on me.” It knows all the devices which will be employed by the wrong couple to avoid occupying the bedroom at the same time, and that the husband of the other woman will suddenly appear and suspect the worst when he beholds her in boudoir attire. It knows equally well that when uncle, wontedly displayed in an old-fashioned white nightgown, goes to sleep on the couch in the sitting-room, the telephone will awaken him, not once but three or four times. It knows that the quarrel between the young wife and husband will be caused by her having washed his favorite pipe in the sink to rid it of the smell she didn’t like. It knows, as it has known since the earliest days of *Charley’s Aunt*, that, even if the visiting relative does not come from Brazil, there will nevertheless on the part of the distraught characters be references to nuts in connection with him. It knows that when the suspicious husband alludes to his wife’s pre-marital affection for the other husband, the wife will admit only that she liked him in a way and that her wrathful mate will meaningfully retort, “That’s the way I mean!”

It knows all these things and dozens more. But what it knows above all is that it has been swindled out of its ticket money by a producer who has palmed off on it a wizened camphor ball as a 1945 Mexican jumping bean.

Charles Butterworth provided what little entertainment there was out of his own pocket, and without help from the author, who opposed the comedian’s talents with what seemed to be drastic determination. The rest of the company was lost in the swamp, which was further mushed by the stage direction.

# HAMLET. DECEMBER 13, 1945

*A version of the Shakespeare tragedy. Produced by Michael Todd for 131 performances in the Columbus Circle Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

BERNARDO	William Weber	OPHELIA	Frances Reid
FRANCISCUS	John Bryant	REYNALDO	Franz Bendtsen
MARCELLUS	Alexander Lockwood	ROSENCRANTZ	Howard Morris
HORATIO	Walter Coy	GUILDENSTERN	Booth Colaman
GHOST OF HAMLET'S FATHER	Victor Thorley	PLAYER KING	Nelson Leigh
CLAUDIUS, KING OF DENMARK	Thomas Gomez	PLAYER QUEEN	Blanche Collins
HAMLET, PRINCE OF DENMARK	Maurice Evans	PLAYER VILLAIN	Alan Dreeben
GERTRUDE, QUEEN OF DENMARK	Lili Darvas	PLAYER PROLOGUE	Alan Masters
POLONIUS	Thomas Chalmers	FORTINBRAS, PRINCE OF NORWAY	Leon Shaw
LAERTES	Emmett Rogers	NORWEGIAN CAPTAIN	Nelson Leigh
		OSRIC	Morton Da Costa

*Lords, Ladies, Soldiers and Attendants*

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *The battlements of the castle at Elsinore.* Scene 2. *Main hall in the castle.* Scene 3. *Apartment of Polonius.* Scene 4. *Battlements of the castle.* Scene 5. *Apartment of Polonius.* Scene 6. *Main hall in the castle.* Scene 7. *Chapel in the castle.* Act II. Scene 1. *The open court in the castle.* Scene 2. *The chapel in the castle.* Scene 3. *The queen's apartment.* Scene 4. *A cellar room in the castle.* Scene 5. *A hall in the castle.* Scene 6. *Street leading to the port.* Scene 7. *Main hall in the castle.* Scene 8. *The open court in the castle.*

Director: George Schaefer.

THE GIBE, "Hamlet has been played by a thousand actors; no wonder he is crazy!" loses force occasionally when an exceptional actor approaches the role with some critical intelligence. Maurice Evans is such a one and his presentation of both the role and the play is accordingly something to be commended to those who have tired of seeing the Dane all too often acted as if he were half desperate psychopathic case and half ancestor of Robert B. Mantell.

No such elderly nonsense for Evans. Like any other close student of the role, he appreciates from the play's sufficient internal evidence that madness in its scientific sense is no slightest part of the character and that what madness there is is in no sense or degree mental but entirely emotional. He realizes, furthermore, as Forbes-Robertson, one of the really great Hamlets, did before him, that the outward appearance of madness is simply that superficial appearance which is criticized by persons of too intense extroversion in one of too intense introversion. And he has absorbed the obvious facts that Hamlet's irascibility with the poltroons Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, his derision of the senile babbler Polonius, his sexual impatience with the shrinking and hesitant Ophelia, his amalgam of pity and contempt for his maritally capricious mother, his explosive hatred for the Claudius who did away with his father and usurped his mother's love, and all other such facets and reactions of character would be basically those of any normal and intelligent man placed in like positions. The Evans Hamlet is thus a rational figure driven to acts rationalized not by the mind but by sound emotions. We have had other such Hamlets in our later time, among them that of Basil Sydney and that of Leslie Howard. But, though that of Sydney in his modern dress version was similarly thought out with uncommon clarity, none of these others has been funneled like Evans' through a sufficiently trained and forceful acting equipment. Evans' one fault is an occasional tendency toward vocal monotony and sprayful diction. Aside from that, while his Dane may not be of the true royal acting rank, it remains perhaps the best in strictly critical analysis that we have had on the American stage in many seasons. This, he demonstrates now as he demonstrated it some years before in the uncut presentation of the tragedy.

The other Hamlets in the later period have been a varying lot. John Barrymore's had much to recommend it, but the points of recommendation were at times overshadowed by the suggestion that he had incorporated a liberal anticipatory echo of Richard III into the portrayal, along with an injection of polite comedy cynicism accompanied by the

elaborate exercise of eyes and mouth common to actors in that species of entertainment. Walter Hampden's was largely a college professor's lecture on the role and followed the old stock company pattern. Fritz Leiber's was very much better, but still too elocutionary and Macbethian. Raymond Massey's was John Wilkes Booth in Shakespearean costume. John Gielgud's was a miscast Osrice, and of so wholesale a neuroticism as at times to be almost burlesque, though I understand that, in his later performances in England, he re-edited his performance to very much better effect. And Leslie Howard's, while basically intelligent, was in physical demonstration so exaggeratedly placid and in acting equipment generally so lacking that the prefatory intelligence went for naught theatrically.

The Evans version of the tragedy is that which he offered to American troops in the Central Pacific during the late war. It is one in which the omission of certain scenes and the cutting of certain others have contrived, with not too much loss, to speed the action to melodramatic ends. The grave diggers scene and that of Ophelia's death are among those missing, doubtless originally as a concession to the men at the battle fronts, to whom, what with the plenitude of mortality in the play's other directions, they might have seemed in the nature of unwelcome and, under the immediate conditions, depressing surplus. The production is further presented in nineteenth century dress, which is hardly the novelty some observers have deemed it. Aside from Shakespeare in twentieth century dress, as we have had him from, among others, Sydney and Orson Welles, the costume device has been practised in one form or another down the long gone years. Garrick played Lear in the dress of his own period, and Macbeth in a Hanoverian uniform. According to the research of Norah Richardson, Mrs. Barry, Miss Belamy, and other such actresses of the far ago played the tragic heroines in hoopskirts and high feathered heads. And so with various others.

"The choice of setting and costume," announces Evans, "was dictated by what we felt would be acceptable to soldier audiences, making them more conscious of the modern par-

allels in the play. The only limitation was that the men must have a reasonable excuse for wearing swords. We settled on an almost story-book period of Mittel-Europa, nineteenth century, as conveying the dual features of a court which was military in character but at the same time decadent. So little reference to clothes or locale is made in *Hamlet* that it is perfectly possible to pick your own century without materially disturbing the text. In this version, the only stumbling blocks are the references to the Ghost's armor, which we have eliminated. The cutting of three lines reconciles the change."

The result, while it may offend the purists, who are customarily promiscuous hounds for offense, is a stimulating theatrical evening, for all the several weaknesses in the cast and certain somewhat confounding selections, notably a Strauss waltz, in the musical accompaniment. The Polonius of Thomas Chalmers, while conducted with relevant vocal drooling, is frequently so overdrooled as to be unintelligible; the Ophelia of Frances Reid, while visually attractive, is a school-girl in acting equipment rather than in character; and the Queen of Lili Darvas is of slightly too heavy an Hungarian accent to fit into the English-spoken frame. But the rest, above all the Claudius of Thomas Gomez, are sufficient to the occasion and with Evans' *Hamlet*, George Schaefer's sure-handed direction, Frederick Stover's accelerative settings, and Irene Sharaff's costumes resolve this *Hamlet* into something of a present day theatrical event.

## DREAM GIRL. DECEMBER 14, 1945

*A comedy-fantasy by Elmer Rice. Produced by the Playwrights' Company for a beyond the season run in the Coronet Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

GEORGINA ALLERTON	<i>Betty Field</i>	GEORGE HAND	<i>Edmon Ryan</i>
LUCY ALLERTON	<i>Evelyn Varden</i>	BERT	<i>Don Stevens</i>
RADIO ANNOUNCER	<i>Keene Crockett</i>	A MEXICAN	<i>Wendell Corey</i>
DR. J. GILMORE PERCIVAL		TWO OTHER	<i>David Pressman</i>
	<i>William A. Lee</i>	MEXICANS	<i>James Gregory</i>
GEORGE ALLERTON	<i>William A. Lee</i>	A WAITER	<i>Stuart Nedd</i>
MIRIAM ALLERTON	LUCAS	ARABELLA	<i>Sonya Stokowski</i>
	<i>Sonya Stokowski</i>	LUIGI	<i>David Pressman</i>
THE OBSTETRICIAN	<i>William A. Lee</i>	AN USHER	<i>Gaynelle Nixon</i>
THE NURSE	<i>Evelyn Varden</i>	MISS DELEHANTY	<i>Helen Bennett</i>
JIM LUCAS	<i>Kevin O'Shea</i>	ANTONIO	<i>Don Stevens</i>
CLAIRE BLAKELY	<i>Helen Marcy</i>	SALARINO	<i>Robert Fletcher</i>
A STOUT WOMAN	<i>Philippa Bevans</i>	A THEATRE MANAGER	
THE DOCTOR	<i>Don Stevens</i>		<i>William A. Lee</i>
CLARK REDFIELD	<i>Wendell Corey</i>	A HEAD-WAITER	<i>Keene Crockett</i>
A POLICEMAN	<i>James Gregory</i>	A WAITER	<i>Robert Fletcher</i>
THE JUDGE	<i>William A. Lee</i>	JUSTICE OF THE PEACE BILLINGS	
THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY			<i>William A. Lee</i>
	<i>Keene Crockett</i>	A CHAUFFEUR	<i>Stuart Nedd</i>

*The action takes place between 8:00 of a spring morning and 4:00 the following morning.*

*Director: Elmer Rice.*

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AS WITH THE ONION, there seem to be two schools of thought about the play. Of the onion, one school maintains with Robert Louis Stevenson that "it ranks with the truffle and the nectarine in the chief place of honor of earth's fruit," and with Oliver Wendell Holmes that "it is a communicative and companionable vegetable, with a real genius for soup." The other school agrees with Ruskin that "it is one of the most powerful means of degrading peasant life and separating it from that of the higher classes," and



with Ben Franklin that "it makes even heroes and widows weep."

Of that more or less kindred plant, Mr. Rice's play, one school, represented by a great majority of the reviewers, holds that it is "delightful," "enchanting," "masterly," "triumphant," and "something to be recommended to everybody." The other school, represented by not more than two or three reviewers, of whom your critical grocer is one, takes the liberty of paraphrasing Ruskin and dubbing it "one of the apparently most powerful means of degrading intelligent drama criticism and separating the peasants from the higher classes."

This second school, if in view of its puny matriculation it merits any so capacious a designation, is, however, despite its cynical amusement, not insensitive to the reasons for the opposition's enthusiasm. The play, in the first place, is mounted with triple-track scenery which, like a new and an ingenious toy, moves back and forth and sidewise and must seem pretty wonderful to children, whether young or adult. It is further, in its picturing of a young woman's romantic day dreams in conflict with less romantic reality, replete with such popular bait as sentiment about babies, sex which in both conversation and act remains always scrupulously and safely this side of its heroine's surplus cocktail or glass of Falerno, comedy involving alarm clocks, colds in the head and loud sneezes, and a rough-diamond Petruchio of a hero, cast with an actor ultimately bound for the cover of *Photoplay*, who ceaselessly insults the heroine and thus naturally reduces her to his matrimonial will.

There are additional and equally obvious reasons. The play gives the star actress the histrionic vaudeville opportunity to do almost everything but walk a tight-rope. This, whatever the thoroughness of a star lady's competences, always makes a deep impression upon many reviewers who are given to an enormous admiration of what they call "versatility," which often means doing half a dozen things indifferently instead of one thing really well. The occupant of the present role, Miss Betty Field, does a number of them very well indeed, but if she did them all badly it would

make little difference. The mere fact that she attempted so extensive a repertoire would, in the minds of the reviewers, redound to her credit. It is thus that an actress who, for example, performs in one of those successive generation plays which show her first as a young girl, next as one in the thirties, thereafter as the mother of several offspring, and ultimately as a grandmother in a wheel chair is pretty certain, whatever the quality of her performance, to get notices worthy of Ringlings' circus.

The circumstance that Mr. Rice has on this occasion foregone his erstwhile tedious excursions into propaganda is another and perhaps the principal factor in the reviewers' reaction. Nor are they on this score to be wondered at. After listening for some years to his wholesale indignations, usually couched in philosophical terms approaching the juvenile, it comes as a relief to them to get a play from him which abjures them and which contents itself with telling a story in romantic terms in turn approaching the juvenile. Gratitude, exaggerated and critically unwarranted though it may be, is accordingly understandable.

What, from the strictly analytical point of view, does the play amount to? To describe it as a homeopathic *Lady In The Dark* without music is a part description. To describe it as an overdone two hour and a half talking version of an Agnes de Mille ballet is a description in perhaps better part. To describe it as a poor play relieved at only widely spaced intervals by a little pointedly observed humor is a description in full part.

It has been one of the peculiarities of the theatre that a scene in a restaurant, café or bar rarely fails to capture an audience's fancy. If, to boot, a little music from offstage musicians accompanies the scene, the capturing may very nearly always be put down as certain. From the distant day of Capus' *The Two Schools*, and before, through Schnitzler's *Anatol* and later through even such otherwise disastrous Broadway plays as *Life's Too Short* any such scene has succeeded in bewitching an audience, even when what has preceded and followed it has not. There have been few exceptions, the latest for some inscrutable reason being the

meritorious one in van Druten's *The Mermaids Singing*. Mr. Rice has craftily included not merely one such episode but two, and, as is more usual, both gratify his trade no end. And, to tell the truth, the episodes, hokum or not, are the best things in his play. The first of the scenes, laid in a fashionable cocktail bar, involves the attempted seduction of his heroine by a knowing and wily man of the world. It is charmingly played by Miss Field and Edmon Ryan; it is recognizable in its drollery; and it lifts the dull fog that has enveloped the earlier proceedings. The second, in a cheap Italian restaurant, involves the heroine and the journalistic Petruchio who finally wins her to wife. The observation here is equally sharp until Mr. Rice, his old impulses getting the better of him, feels it incumbent upon him to ventilate some of the Rice brand of philosophy on life, art, and other matters. His definition of art in relation to life is in particular the kind of spaghetti which should have driven his not entirely unintelligent heroine out of the place and back to Ryan at the cocktail bar.

The rest of the play fore and aft amounts to little more than what Broadway customarily refers to as a "*tour de force*," which means the kind of play deliberately calculated, as was *Lady In The Dark*, to give over the stage for most of the evening to a demonstration of the talents of a leading actress. The calculation on this occasion has been the loving gesture of a playwright for his actress wife. The latter, the Miss Field noted, is a thoroughly likable and gifted young woman who often manages her assignment with skill but upon whom has been lodged a burden that would tax the resources of a trio of Comédie Française war-horses. That she has some difficulty running the acting gamut from a coy *Backfisch* to a travesty street-walker and the Portia of *The Merchant Of Venice* is therefore not altogether surprising.

Mr. Rice's direction is able; Jo Mielziner's Baltimore and Ohio scenic devices are everything that the producer ordered; and the cast is generally commendable. But as for the play with its junior disquisitions on psychiatry, literature, life, etc., and with its over-all camera writing, I find

myself in accord with my schoolmate, the late Wilella Waldorf, who said, "Take it away, Hollywood!"

The occasion brings us to a consideration of daily newspaper reviewing in general. The primary weakness of that reviewing as practised by many of the dailies is, as in this case, its obvious basic conviction that it should tell or at least intimate to its readers what plays they should or should not see. Its secondary weakness is that the readers often put faith in it and obediently follow its guidance. Its tertiary weakness is that they often are deeply gratified.

All this may be very satisfactory to the papers' business offices, and in various instances equally so to the theatres', but it is considerably less so to the estate of the theatre, drama, and drama criticism. I offer two recent illustrations, the hereinbefore recorded *A Sound Of Hunting* and *The Mermaids Singing*. Both plays, from any substantial critical point of view, had some real merit; both were given poor notices by the great majority of the newspaper reviewers; both, it was to be admitted from the latter's point of view, were not the kind of plays the preponderance of their readers were likely to admire; and both duly failed to do business, the first named having to close after only twenty-three performances. Meanwhile, at least other plays, *Deep Are The Roots* and *State Of The Union*, which were distinctly inferior from any considered critical viewpoint but which were good shows for the popular trade, were highly touted and were consequently established as big box-office successes.

The situation is not restricted to the several plays mentioned. It repeats itself every year. And in it we may perceive one of the reasons why our theatre's artistic advance is as lamentably slow as it is. The reviewers are not entirely and justly to be blamed. They have certain jobs to fill, and they fill them pursuant to the unwritten but none the less self-appreciated rules. They may now and then find their personal tastes and prejudices at variance with the spook rules and may occasionally rebel and let critical independence take its course. Or they may be so critically constituted that what is popular is most greatly to their personal tastes,

in which case the unwritten rules do not at all trouble them. But in both cases they for the most part willingly follow the bell-cow, which is the public.

This is not to say, of course, that a critically sound play may intermittently not at the same time be a popular play. It may well be. But not very often, as things presently go in our theatre. It is rather and simply to say that three-fourths of the plays which the reviewers endorse are without the genuine quality, or even relative quality, of some of those which they disparage. It would in this direction require a peculiar critical equipment to believe, for example, that a discredited fantasy like *A Highland Fling* was less worthy than an endorsed one like this *Dream Girl*, that a denounced drama like *Outrageous Fortune* was less meritorious than a praised one like *The Searching Wind*, or that a loftily dismissed offering like *Dark Of The Moon* was far from the stature of a eulogized one like *Anna Lucasta*.

Difference of opinion may, as the saying goes, make horse races, but there is some reason to suspect that it does not necessarily make good drama criticism. There are, after all, established standards of criticism and accepted bases, which, I hope, need not again be entered into here. Among the attributes of such criticism are taste, training, experience, exploratory skill, courage, the validity of personal prejudice, and a variety of other desiderata. If you prefer Congreve and I prefer Philip Barry, difference of opinion is no excuse. You are a sound critic, and I am a dunce, and that is all there is to it. It is thus that the reviewer who esteems, as he has esteemed, a play like *The Corn Is Green* above one like *My Heart's In The Highlands* or a play like *The Glass Menagerie* above one like Chesterton's *Magic* — I deliberately choose secondary specimens — is, while he may be entitled to his opinions, scarcely entitled to pass them off for anything approaching drama criticism.

The theatre is not, or should not be, a mere popular amusement mill, certainly not in the view of any man whose profession is criticism and whose pride in and for the theatre is collaterally high. So to regard it is to debase not only criticism but the practitioner of it himself. One does not

accept money from a street-walker, and that is what the theatre is when it sells itself promiscuously to seekers of transient pastime and transient gratification. "Only the ablest critics," Bernard Shaw has written, "believe that the theatre is really important. In my time none of them would claim for it, as I claimed for it, that it is as important as the Church was in the Middle Ages and much more important than the Church was in London in the years under review. A theatre to me is a place 'where two or three are gathered together.'" And then, with pardonable vanity, "The apostolic succession from Æschylus to myself is as serious and as continuously inspired as that younger institution, the apostolic succession of the Christian Church."

When we hear talk of the decline of the theatre it is not the theatre which has declined; it is rather only and occasionally that smaller part of it, the stage.

As to that stage, I quote again, this time O'Casey, from an inscription in the latest volume of his sterling autobiography, *Drums Under The Windows*, bespeaking a comradeship of all those who tilt "for righteousness, deep sorrow, the loud, reckless laugh, the stirring dance, and the gay song in the theatre; the voice of man speaking his best, in good round terms, finding loveliness in the murk of a dark night, or the sunniness of a fine, fair day."

To revert to the Brown and van Druten plays offered in illustration of the reviewing attitude, neither, it is quickly to be granted, is anything in the nature of a masterpiece, but both in their different ways are far superior to the run of plays of their kind. The former, as I have before noted, seems to me to be, indeed, the best American play dealing with soldiers at war since the Anderson-Stallings *What Price Glory?*, and the latter, as I have also noted, one of the best sex comedies, along with the same author's *The Voice Of The Turtle*, which is the worthier of the two, that the local stage has divulged in a number of years. These are relative virtues, I appreciate, but though relative criticism may be scholastically deplorable, it is relative values with which these particular remarks are necessarily brought to deal.

Brown's *A Sound Of Hunting*, like van Druten's *The Mermaids Singing*, suffers the reviewers' stings for reasons that are largely uncritical. Both have been found wanting not so much on dramatic critical grounds as on purely theatrical. Thus, as I have said earlier, though the former is a very much better play than the great majority of plays that have treated of soldiers, the circumstance that we already have had other plays with the same characters and something of the same characters' speech and conduct is held against it. The fact that it handles its subject matter much more expertly is regarded as of small account, and criticism lodged against it simply on the ground of superficial Broadway similarity. This similarity in this specific case is critically of no slightest consequence. Brown has taken familiar materials and with something approaching poetic imagination has given them overtones not even faintly sounded in the other plays of a sort. At only one point — his earlier mentioned unintentional travesty of the war correspondent — does he sink to the commonplace level. In the main, he has lacquered the materials with a health of humor and an honesty of feeling that resolve them into valid and stimulating drama.

In *The Mermaids Singing*, van Druten, as previously stated, also exercises his skill upon familiar materials: the middle-aged married man with whom a young girl becomes smitten and who, though fetched by her in turn, hesitates between practical common sense and romance. But here again the materials have been subjected to so much wit, insight, and worldly intelligence that they lose all trace of dust and emerge in major part with considerable sheen. The argument of the play is adultery pro and con. With nimble fingers, van Druten strums the black and white keys and evokes some lively tunes both for and against. Never vulgar, never cheap, always graceful-minded and literate, he toys with the various chords and, while evoking no startlingly new melody, at least avoids the dissonances which so many of his colleagues in the writing of sex comedy seem to think are philosophical equivalents of those of Richard Strauss.

Van Druten's shrewd trick is the statement of the immoral in terms of the moral. And his even shrewder trick is to induce in his audience apology for and sympathy with moral lapse with no slightest emphasis on his own part. He is in many respects, now that he has left his native England and become a citizen of the Republic, not only the ablest but the most entertaining writer of sex comedy that we have. Behrman, who once held that position, has permitted social consciousness and other such comedy mischiefs to take their dramaturgical revenge on him. And Vincent Lawrence, though remaining aloof from such extrinsic elements, while still showing signs of his old expertness has in late years failed to live up to his praiseworthy beginnings. Van Druten thus seems for the time being to have the field to himself.

In our theatre, sex is most usually treated in one of three ways. The first is in terms of tragedy, often with a melodramatic pitch. The second is in terms of farce, often with a smutty pitch. The third is in terms of a philosophy that is found to be somewhere between the boyhood short and long pants period. In the first instance, the consequences of sex are either mortal punishment or one that leaves a hapless imprint upon the still living psyche. In the second, the biological and romantic act is indistinguishable from the amours of residents in a pig-sty. In the third, sex and its emotional disturbances are dissected with what the playwrights believe to be gleaming scalpels but what are plainly only lurid sugar-tongs. Van Druten sees sex not as tragical, seldom as soiled, and never as something calling for any particular profundity. He sees it simply as a lesser adventure in the larger life that is sometimes gay, sometimes a little sad, of no great importance nor yet of little, and always as something to be taken with a philosophical smile now and again perhaps touched faintly with a sigh. Van Druten is a wise man.



## THE READERS THEATRE. DECEMBER 16, 1945

*Sophocles' Oedipus Rex, in the English version by William Butler Yeats. Presented by the Readers Theatre, Inc., for 2 performances in the Majestic Theatre.*

### CAST

NARRATOR	<i>Eugene O'Neill, Jr.</i>	FIRST MESSENGER	<i>Robert Harris</i>
OEDIPUS	<i>Frederic Tozere</i>	SECOND MESSENGER	
JOCASTA	<i>Blanche Yurka</i>		<i>Frederic Downs</i>
CREON	<i>William Adams</i>	HERDSMAN	<i>Art Smith</i>
TIRESIAS	<i>Harry Irvine</i>	CHORUS LEADER	<i>Bram Nossen</i>
PRIEST	<i>Martin Wolfson</i>	CHORUS	<i>William Hughes</i>

Director: *James Light.*

THE PROSPECTUS ANNOUNCES: "The Readers Theatre has been inaugurated to meet a very real and pressing demand by the general theatregoing public. The proposal is to give the people of New York an opportunity to witness performances of great dramatic works which are now seldom if ever produced. It is planned to present a series of these classics in the following manner. In order to avoid the great technical and financial responsibilities that full production entails, the plays selected will all be presented without scenery or costuming by a cast of competent professional actors. There will be rehearsals before presentation to develop the essential dramatic action of each drama, but the actors will be relieved of the tedious task of committing the text of their parts to memory, and will use the part scripts during the performance. It is the conviction of the directors of the Readers Theatre that in this way a valid and exciting interpretation of a play can be presented."

The initial play submitted was, as noted, Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, in the English version by William Butler Yeats. The theory advanced by the prospectus that there was "a very real and pressing demand by the general the-

atregoing public" for the venture seemed to be lacking in any perceptible support. It appeared to be the opinion of the handful of members of that public who attended the readings that they were more aptly suited to the Chautauqua circuit, a Town Hall platform, or some other such medium. The stage of a theatre, whose commanded purpose is illusion, was scarcely the place for them. To watch a number of actors in street clothes holding scripts in one hand and making gestures with the other, the while they variously intone or gush lines of dialogue, is considerably less contributive to such illusion, or even to intelligent digestion, than a solo imagination in the library. The intent of the Readers Theatre was noble enough. It would be well for the public to become acquainted with classics which the theatre in these days all too seldom sees fit to provide it. But the plan here put into motion is a mongrel one, and will not serve.

## HOME IS THE HUNTER. DECEMBER 20, 1945

*A play by Samuel M. Kootz. Produced by the American Negro Theatre for 18 performances in the West 126th Street Theatre.*

## CAST

Elwood Smith, Clarice Taylor, Maxwell Glanville, and Evelio Grillo.  
Director: Abram Hill.

L AID IN an American industrial town beset by labor and other problems, the four character play's central figure is a returned soldier who, in the author's description, "went abroad to fight Fascism and became converted to it because he would like to exercise such power himself and because he would like to enjoy the ruthless, brutal control which Fascism has over its subjects." It takes no clairvoyant to guess that, as things go in the theatre these days, the convert ends up in a mighty tragic predicament.

The author, by profession an art dealer, has not suffered any noticeable contagion from his vocational surroundings. His exhibit, which is infinitely less a play than a series of quotations from pamphlets arguing the causes of capital and labor, is simply a procession of words headed by a brass band blowing its head off. Indignation, he has not learned, is the master of bad playwrights and the servant of able ones. Its child in the former's case is, as in this play, cheap melodrama. A four character play, furthermore, is ever a challenge to dramaturgical talent, and where talent is absent the result suggests a child's penny bank economy.

Of the various four character plays shown in the local theatre in the last forty years, not more than two at most have indicated any genuine dramaturgical skill: Karl Schönherr's *Thy Name Is Woman*, produced in the Benjamin Glazer adaptation in 1921, and John van Druten's *There's Always Juliet*, produced in 1932. Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* owed its favorable critical reception much less to any actual internal merit than to the

high excellence of its acting and physical production. Other such plays as Edward Locke's *The Climax*, produced in 1909, and Berte Thomas' *Under Orders*, in 1918, the latter utilizing two actors in the four roles, were merely successful box-office stunts; while still others, also pitched hopefully at the box-office, like W. D. Bristol's *Reprise*, 1935, and Irving Stone's *Truly Valiant*, 1936, were so lamentable in every respect that they lasted for but a single performance each. Edward Chodorov's *Those Endearing Young Charms* of a few seasons ago, along with J. Lee Thompson's *Murder Without Crime*, were alike worthless, and duly failed.

Of the even more difficult three character plays in the same general period, only van Druten's *The Voice Of The Turtle*, produced in December, 1943, has earned critical endorsement. J. M. Barrie's short *A Slice Of Life*, produced in 1912, was an inferior example of the Scot dramatist's work, and a deserved failure. Of the yet still more difficult two character plays, Louis Verneuil's *Jealousy*, in the adaptation by Eugene Walter, produced in 1928, took what palms there were. In the way of the almost impossible one character play, Irving Kaye Davis' *Courtesan*, produced in 1930, was the century's horrible example, with Cornelia Otis Skinner's *Edna, His Wife*, in 1937, in which the author essayed eight different roles and thus cheated the strict definition, the runner-up. There have been, in all, thirty-four such specimens of small cast plays. The critical score has been four white marks against two half-white half-black and twenty-eight wholly black.

The acting and direction of Mr. Kootz's play were of appropriate species.

The subsequent production by the Negro Theatre was a revival on February 28, 1946, of Abram Hill's *On Strivers' Row*, originally shown in 1940. An attempted satire on Harlem social climbers, it lacks any suggestion of wit and is further deadened by verbosity. The acting company, which included Dorothy Carter, Isabell Sanford, Draynard Clinton, Letitia Toole, Jvotte Sutton, Stanley Greene, Hattie King-Reavis, and Vernada Laselle, was nothing to speak of, and the engagement was a short one.

## BILLION DOLLAR BABY. DECEMBER 21, 1945

*A musical comedy with book and lyrics by Betty Comden and Adolph Green, music by Morton Gould. Produced by Paul Feigay and Oliver Smith for a rest of the season's run in the Alvin Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

MA JONES	Emily Ross	JERRY BONANZA	Don de Leo
PA JONES	William David	FIRST NEWSBOY	Douglas Jones
ESME	Shirley Van	SECOND NEWSBOY	Richard Thomas
JANET	Maria Harriton	DAPPER WELCH	David Burns
FIRST NEIGHBOR	Edward Hodge	ROCKY BARTON	William Tabbert
SECOND NEIGHBOR	Howard Lenters	CIGARETTE GIRL	Jeri Archer
THIRD NEIGHBOR	Douglas Deane	WAITER	David Thomas
CHAMP WATSON	Danny Daniels	M. M. MONTAGUE	
PHOTOGRAPHER	Anthony Reed		Robert Chisholm
REPORTER	Allan Gilbert	FIRST CHORUS GIRL	Joan Mann
MARIBELLE	Joan McCracken	SECOND CHORUS GIRL	
GAWKY GIRL	Helen Gallagher		Lorraine Todd
MOTHER	Beverly Hoster	THIRD CHORUS GIRL	
MISS TEXAS	Althea Elder		Virginia Gorski
M. C.	Richard Sanford	FOURTH CHORUS GIRL	Virginia Poe
GEORGIA MOTLEY	Mitzi Green	J. C. CREASY	Horace Cooper
VIOLIN PLAYER	Tony Cardell	ART LEFFENBUSH	Edward Hodge

SYNOPSIS: Time. 1928-1929. Act I. Scene 1. *Staten Island living-room.* Scene 2. *Atlantic City Boardwalk.* Scene 3. *Staten Island living-room.* Scene 4. *Staten Island ferry.* Scene 5. *Front of speakeasy.* Scene 6. *Chez Georgia.* Scene 7. *Georgia's dressing room.* Scene 8. *Staten Island living-room.* Scene 9. *Street.* Scene 10. *Dapper's apartment.* Scene 11. *The Marathon.* Scene 12. *Dapper's apartment.* Scene 13. *Backstage of the Jollities.* Scene 14. *On stage Jollities.* Act II. Scene 1. *A funeral.* Scene 2. *Porch of the Plaza Hotel, Palm Beach.* Scene 3. *Entrance to Marathon.* Scene 4. *The Marathon.* Scene 5. *Entrance to Marathon.* Scene 6. *Maribelle's bedroom.* Scene 7. *Church vestry.* Scene 8. *Wedding.*

Director: George Abbott.

THE SHOW is another in the later day series of attempts to break away from the romantic musical and to toughen it up in the interests of what is believed to be modernity, which would amuse the John Gay who wrote *The Beggar's*

*Opera* all of two hundred and eighteen years ago. Among the other attempts have been *Pal Joey*, *On The Town*, and such derivatives as *Sadie Thompson*, with *Windy City* and the musicalized *Street Scene* in the offing.

Apart from *Gay*, the notion of using crooks, thugs, outlaws and malefactors in general in musical exhibits is almost as old as the harmonichord. Not to go back that far, the stage in more modern times has offered the idea in the persons of all kinds of such loafers from Corrigan and Danny Mann in *The Lily Of Killarney* to the thieves Cadeaux and Ravennes in *Erminie* and from the knaves Fresco and Snarleyow in *Sinbad*, or *The Maid Of Balsora*, the gypsy marauder Devilshoof in *The Bohemian Girl*, and the celebrated bandit and robber Fra Diavolo to the bad boys and girls in various such later exhibits as *May Wine*, *Merry, Merry, Polly*, *Tip-Toes*, et al.

Betty Comden and Adolph Green, authors of this *Billion Dollar Baby*, owe a considerable debt to Anita Loos and John O'Hara. (Also a modest one to Guy Bolton and Fred Thompson for their gunning Tip-Toes Kaye in the above last named show.) From Miss Loos they have borrowed the character of the soft-spoken, hard-hearted little gold-digger Lorelei out of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, a big sister to the aforesaid Tip-Toes, and from O'Hara the tough muggery of *Pal Joey*, and have combined the two into an evening which, while occasionally amusing, often suggests that they should, while they were about it, also have borrowed a lot of the Loos humor and the O'Hara repertorial *élan*.

Where Miss Loos and O'Hara wrote of things which they knew from first-hand observation, Miss Comden and Green seem to have written of much the same things from second-hand. It is possible that they personally engaged the intimacies of the Prohibition period of which they treat, but somehow their show does not quite convince one of the fact. Too often one feels that people done tol' 'em. This, of course, would be perfectly satisfactory if they had the ears and noses to duplicate the materials realistically, as others have done before them, but such organs do not ap-

pear to be their particular blessing. Their marketpiece accordingly has the general air of someone else's scrapbook. One further gets the feeling that they are reporting very much less from the activities of the boozy Twenties than from those activities as reported by plays and shows they have seen. Their Prohibition gangster stage is the stage of *Johnny 2 x 4, et al.*; their travesty of the old Ziegfeld-Carroll spectacles is surely something they saw in Moss Hart's and Irving Berlin's *Face The Music* and, paraphrased to night club floor show purposes, in *Pal Joey*; and other of their conceits are equally familiar to anyone who has gone to the theatre apparently as regularly, and attentively, as they have. Yet, if you relish hash, portions of their show are as relishable as any hash is likely possible to be. The keeping of their little heroine a distaff-dog until the end, while theatrically no novelty, is appetizing. So, too, is their treatment of the little one's grafting but genial mother. And so is their picture of elderly Wall Street idiots. The performance of Mitzi Green as Texas Guinan also helps out the evening enormously. Though the materials provided her are scanty, she catches not only the superficial aspects of the First Lady of the speakeasy era but the very gizzard, including that radiating inner warmth and boisterous impertinence of spirit which made her the figure she was. And Jerome Robbins' dance numbers, save only the dream ballet in the second act, have wit and vim, as in lesser degree have Oliver Smith's settings. Morton Gould's music, however, is a minus element.

In the coy little gold-digger role, Joan McCracken, aside from her dance contributions, is hardly an exciting choice. Fortunately here rid of her previous implausible lambkin antics, she is still nevertheless unsuited to the part, which calls for an entirely different type of young actress. Miss McCracken looks altogether too much like a good, sturdy home-girl, with overtones of a handy person around the kitchen. The males serve only moderately well; that is the best that may be said for them. On the whole, set down the occasion as entertaining in spots, as directed for all it is worth by George Abbott, and as a field-day for Miss Green.

## LITTLE WOMEN. DECEMBER 23, 1945

*Still another revival of the Marian De Forrest dramatization of the Louisa M. Alcott novel. Produced by Frank McCoy for a 2 weeks' holiday engagement in the City Center Theatre.*

## CAST

Velma Royton, Clark Williams, Grace Mills, David Lewis, Harrison Dowd, Margaret Hayes, Gloria Stroock, Dortha Duckworth, Billie Lou Watt, and Jack Lorenz.

Director: *Frank McCoy.*

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THE DRAMATIC deterioration of what, at least in prospectus, was to be a civic theatre, continued apace with this slipshod revival, which in no way compared with the revival of the same play in the same holiday period the season before. The company, with the exception of the several actors who had appeared in the latter production, was an uninvitingly inferior one, and the stage direction was of the kind that would not be tolerated in a third-rate stock company.

So much for the record. As for the play itself, see *The Theatre Book Of The Year, 1944-1945*.



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 PYGMALION. DECEMBER 26, 1945

*The comedy by George Bernard Shaw. Revived by Theatre Incorporated for a rest of the season's performances in the Ethel Barrymore Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

CLARA EYNSFORD-HILL	HENRY HIGGINS	Raymond Massey
Wendy Atkin	SARCASTIC BYSTANDER	Jay Black
MRS. EYNSFORD-HILL	TAXICAB DRIVER	Rudolph Watson
Myrtle Tannehill	MRS. PEARCE	Anita Bolster
BYSTANDER	J. P. Watson	ALFRED DOOLITTLE
FREDDY EYNSFORD-HILL		Melville Cooper
John Cromwell	MRS. HIGGINS	Katherine Emmet
ELIZA DOOLITTLE	PARLOURMAID	Hazel Jones
Gertrude Lawrence		
COLONEL PICKERING		
Cecil Humphreys		

SYNOPSIS: *The action of the play takes place in London in the year 1908. Prologue. Portico of Saint Paul's Church, Covent Garden, 11:15 p.m. Act I. Henry Higgins' laboratory, Wimpole Street. Next morning. Act II. Mrs. Higgins' drawing-room, Chelsea Embankment. Late afternoon. 3 months later. Act III. Scene 1. Henry Higgins' laboratory. Midnight. Several months later. Scene 2. Mrs. Higgins' drawing-room. Next morning.*

Director: Cedric Hardwicke.

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SHAW in these later years seems largely to have been abandoned by the professional theatre and relegated to the amateur stage. The season's only performances of him, aside from this *Pygmalion* and the Cornell revival in April of *Candida*, have been those for a single night by the Washington Square Players of his minor short plays, (*q.v.*), and that of his *Androcles And The Lion* for six nights by the tyros of the Dramatic Workshop of the so-called New School For Social Research.

The present occasion recalls one of the most remarkable items of criticism in many years of pretty remarkable critical items, to wit, that which our American playwright,

Maxwell Anderson, contributed in 1919 to the pages of *Publishers' Weekly*. Said Mr. Anderson: "Technically, *Heartbreak House* is equal to everything but the best of Shaw. But we certainly begin to understand his methods almost unflatteringly well. Shaw is a keen and ready philosopher but, despite the critics, no dramatist. His characters are exaggerations, his situations farcical."

Generously allowing for the time at which Mr. Anderson exposed his critical competences and overlooking the somewhat confounding circumstance that the one criticized as no dramatist had even then produced such specimens, among many others, as *Man And Superman*, *Major Barbara*, *The Doctor's Dilemma*, *Androcles And The Lion*, and this *Pygmalion*, we are still left a little dizzy. Our vertigo is induced by Mr. Anderson's belief that exaggerated characters and farcical situations definitely prove that their sponsor can not, despite the critical ignoramuses, be a dramatist. What spins us around is the implied criticism that under the circumstances Aristophanes, Molière, Sheridan, and a dozen or so other such rank pretenders can not be dramatists either. If *Pygmalion*, though admittedly one of Shaw's lesser efforts, is not the product of a dramatist, then Maxwell Anderson's *Truckline Café*, for just one juicy example, must be. *Pygmalion* without doubt has dramaturgical flaws violently disturbing to the classroom, as no less have the plays of other such dramatic duffers as Pirandello, O'Casey, Dunsany, *et al.*, but for all its thirty-four years' age it makes most of the stuff seen on the stage these days look like unsalted peanuts. The sparkle of its wit is still slightly superior to such contraceptive efforts, in Mr. Anderson's *The Eve of St. Mark*, as "Drugs aren't the only things they sell in drugstores." Its character exaggeration is still faintly superior to that, say, of the two crooks in Mr. Anderson's *High Tor*. And its farcical situations may be said to be still middlingly superior to those in, for instance, Mr. Anderson's *Gypsy* or *Both Your Houses*.

I am not, I hope, impolitely using Mr. Anderson as a solo chopping-block in connection with Shaw. There have been

and there remain any number of like solons who believe that if the Sazarac cocktail of Celtic-British letters had only studied under W. T. Price, author of *The Technique Of The Drama*, he might happily have written plays in stricter accordance with the Price rules. But plays that gratify and entertain cultured audiences are somehow often written in contempt of such rules, and this *Pygmalion* in considerable part is such a one. Shaw's single peculiar concession was the adding, twenty-six years after the play was originally produced, of a line which hinted at the likelihood of his heroine's and hero's marriage. Otherwise, contemplating the great success of the play, he observed with jovial derision, "It is so intensely and deliberately didactic, and its subject so dry, that I delight in throwing it at the heads of the wiseacres who repeat the parrot cry that art should never be didactic. It goes to prove my contention that art should never be anything else."

Aside from some commendable settings by Donald Oenslager and costumes by Motley, the present production is lacking on various counts. Miss Lawrence, to be commended for her physical suppressions, nevertheless misses in the Galatea role; her progress from the lowly Cockney flower-girl to an associate of duchesses is more a matter of costume change than change in character. Though her speech and accent develop under the tutelage of her Pygmalion, the inner, psychical improvement imagined by the dramatist is confined to the spoken lines and is otherwise only superficially indicated. In addition, vanity has impelled the actress, when in the early stages of the play she makes her first appearance in Higgins' Wimpole Street laboratory, so promptly to adorn herself with an elegant Japanese ensemble and with such an attractive makeup that her subsequent metamorphosis goes for little. Mr. Massey's Higgins-Pygmalion is merely a well-tailored recitationist; as an actor, he gives nothing to the role. Melville Cooper, as the Galatea's dustman father who disgustedly finds himself depressed into the precincts of middle-class morality, is amusing, but in a burlesque fashion scarcely suited to the play. The lesser roles alone receive their due.

Cedric Hardwicke's general direction, furthermore, is altogether too listless and stuffy, and fails to bring to the script the stage life inherent in it.

The Theatre Incorporated group responsible for the production sententiously hails itself as "committed to a sustained program of great plays of the past and outstanding plays of the present. Its income is to be devoted to the continuation of such a program on a permanent basis, to the encouragement of young playwrights, directors and actors through a subsidiary experimental theatre, to the utilization of the stage as an educational force, and to the ultimate development of a true people's theatre." A high and august aim. But *Pygmalion*, the group's introductory exhibit, for all its merits is hardly one of the "great plays of the past," and the manner of its presentation hardly the equal, save visually, of the Mrs. Patrick Campbell-Philip Merivale production here in 1914 or of even the Lynn Fontanne-Reginald Mason one twelve years later.

## DUNNIGAN'S DAUGHTER. DECEMBER 26, 1945

*A play by S. N. Behrman. Produced by the Theatre Guild for 37 performances in the Golden Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

JIM BAIRD	<i>Richard Widmark</i>	FERNE RAINIER	<i>June Havoc</i>
ROBERT	<i>Hale Norcross</i>	CLAY RAINIER	<i>Dennis King</i>
ZELDA RAINIER	<i>Jan Sterling</i>	JESUS Y BLASCO HERNANDEZ	
MIGUEL RIACHI	<i>Luther Adler</i>		<i>Arthur Gonda</i>

SYNOPSIS: *The action of the play takes place in Clay Rainier's Mexican residence outside a small mining town. Act I. Afternoon. Act II. That evening — after dinner. Act III. The following morning.*

Director: *Elia Kazan.*

THE PLAY is the poorest to come from Mr. Behrman in some years and attests further and signally to the inroads on his erstwhile valuable comedy talent wrought by his previously noted preoccupation with economic, sociological, and political matters. Like a number of his playwrighting brothers, as also noted, he has come to believe that a study of human beings in relation to one another can in these times be important only if they be treated as so many Harold Laskis and Dorothy Thompsons, and that as a consequence anything like *The Voice Of The Turtle* amounts to less than nothing if compared with something like *Foxhole In The Parlor*. The sooner the estimable Mr. Behrman returns to his earlier mutttons, the better it will be for Mr. Behrman, his audiences, and the reactions of drama criticism.

The author's considerable revision of his play during its tryout period has not improved it and only goes to prove the fatuity of the popular contention that good plays are not written but rewritten. Good plays are written in the first place. Indifferent plays may be rewritten with box-office success, but they remain indifferent plays. Bad plays persist in being bad plays however much rewriting is done on them, and this is still a bad play.

Its loquacious story is of an egocentric millionaire industrialist and of his relations with his daughter by his first marriage and with his young second wife, who is eventually driven by his pragmatism into the arms of a young idealist connected with the State Department. The narrative, which is dramatically actionless, is rendered even more static by the injection into it of capital and labor, political, economic, and kindred disquisitions which not only throw the plot out of gear but into grisly tedium. Some of the dialogue, when concerned with what it properly should be, is in Behrman's customary literate if here and there too horticultural vein, yet little on this occasion may be allowed for such of his epigrammatic passages as "Compromise is what makes marriage," with the retort, "No; hope," and for such of his cliché interjections as "At least you are frank." Nor is there anything to admire in such hardly sempervirent devices as indicating the other side of his hard industrialist in his fondness for the painting of Vermeer and his ability to play the piano. The direction by Mr. Kazan was of the overly high-toned species associated with polite comedy in the bucolic summer theatres, and the acting, which on the part of the ladies sought to augment the comedy spirit with determined and hypothetically adorable smiles, was of an inpecunious brand.

One month last year, Frank Sinatra, crooning darling of the bobby-soxers, dispatched himself to Gary, Indiana, at the invitation of the mayor and organizations advocating racial tolerance, to address the high school students in an attempt to influence them to call off their strike against Negro fellow students. Frank drew an audience of five thousand boys and girls and, according to the *United Press*, "sent" them with his interpolated singing, but not back to school.

Frank's impassioned pleas, couched in language calculated to turn even a rhinoceros' heart, were lost on his auditors, who, though they listened politely, showed unmistakable signs and portents of preferring their crusading pet in a blues singing capacity, as was duly substantiated when the meeting was over. One girl, interviewed by the

press on her reaction, allowed, "His singing was too divine for words, but who wants to listen to such talk?" Another gave it as her considered opinion that "His speech may have calmed down a few people, but it didn't do much else; all he did was to tell people off." A third student, a male, backed them up. "There are too many fixers trying to fix up the world today; what we need are more singers." And so on.

It once again seems to me that these youngsters reflect pretty accurately the feelings of many theatre audiences, as various recent plays like the one under consideration have attested. It is not that, like them, the audiences insist upon singing above everything and reserve their sole interest for musical shows. But, like the youngsters, they give intimations of being fed up with playwrights who regard themselves as doctors of the world's ills, who lecture them on what is wrong with them, and who make them wish that they had spent the evening at *Carousel* or *Show Boat*.

That they are beginning to gag at being instructed in their theoretical social, political, economic and other malaises seems to be indicated by quite a few statistics, as the producers in the last two seasons have begun to find out. *The Day Will Come*, which preached racial tolerance at them for two and one-half hours, was consigned to the storehouse after twenty performances. *Men To The Sea*, which pleaded for the faithfulness of servicemen's wives and pleaded so vociferously you could hear it a mile away, lasted for just twenty-three. *Sophie*, which screamed for a tolerant attitude toward foreigners, managed only nine. *A Place Of Our Own*, which argued lustily against the evil of pressure politicians, was lucky to get eight. *Common Ground*, which heatedly urged racial tolerance and the brotherhood of man against the powers of Fascism, desperately managed a forced sixty-nine, and those at cut-rates. *Foxhole In The Parlor*, which went at its audiences with hammer and tongs in an effort to persuade them that they personally were responsible to God for the world's peace, was hooted off after forty-four, also at cut-rates. *The Assassin*, which orated on the virtue of a common stand

against anybody who stood in the way of the democratic ideal, drew hardly enough trade for even thirteen showings. Only *Deep Are The Roots*, which pleads for the Negro and racial equality, has got by on its own, and largely, if we may trust the opinions of its trade, on the score of the pseudo-sensational scene in which a white girl tells a Negro that she loves him and wants to marry him, which would probably draw audiences today, as it did years ago, were it incorporated into even something like *Popsy*. Without any such box-office scene, both *Strange Fruit* and *Jeb*, which issued a similar plea, were abrupt failures. And plays like *Home Of The Brave*, with their melodramatic denunciations of racial and religious prejudice, have found the going almost as hard.

The acceptance by audiences of *A Bell For Adano* with its pro-Democracy theme may not strictly be listed in the propaganda play catalogue as propaganda plays are here defined. Though unquestionably propaganda, the propaganda was not loudly and independently proclaimed as in most of these others, but was allowed to filter naturally and easily through the drama itself.

In using the phrase, "got by on its own," in connection with *Deep Are The Roots*, I have in mind the Sherwood play, *The Rugged Path*. What measure of audience interest it attracted was attributable not to the play but to the presence in the cast of Spencer Tracy, the moving picture actor who returned to the stage after a long absence. This Tracy is a sentimental memory among theatregoers; there was considerable curiosity over what his acting would be like after so long an immersion in the films; and people went to see him, irrespective of the play, as they probably would have gone to see him if he had appeared in something by his cook.

This *The Rugged Path* represents the evils of propaganda drama full-fledged. Sermonizing against the corruption of American newspapers, against isolationism, against those Americans who do not hold themselves personally and individually responsible for the preservation of the world's peace, and against several other such items which



annoy him, Sherwood, after the curtain has been up for less than twenty minutes, forgets all about the necessity for interesting his audience in cumulative drama and tries to hold its attention instead with harangues on his favorite indignations. He doesn't succeed. His audience says to itself, "Doubtless he is right, but we've heard it all so often before that, right or wrong, it's damned dull and why in the name of all that's holy didn't we go to see *Harvey* for a second time?"

By nine-thirty, after Sherwood's idealistic newspaper editor who resigns his job and goes forth to learn the why and wherefore of things has been talking steadily about crooked isolationist newspapers the audience's eyes and ears begin to droop. By ten-fifteen, after he has been talking steadily about the need for Americans to wake up and assume an individual responsibility for the permanent security of world order, it is half asleep. And by eleven, after he has been talking steadily about the shining light of Democracy and it being the only hope for the salvation of the cosmos, it is dead to the world. It was not Tracy's fault, his performance was all that could be desired; it is the playwright's. You can't make bricks out of straw, but apparently you can make a very good pillow.

Audiences may accept propaganda plays now and then, but if and when they accept them the plays have to offer something besides, and most of the plays do not, and consequently fail. Of the forty-five plays that have enjoyed the longest runs in the modern American theatre only one has been a propaganda play in the relative definition and that one, *Dead End*, concealed its propaganda so adroitly that audiences were barely conscious of it. What the public evidently wants is not addresses and exhortations on its social, political and other supposed infirmities, but rather restrainedly intelligent plays which do not forget that a little entertainment isn't altogether out of place in the theatre. What the public evidently and accordingly wants and visits success upon are plays like *The Glass Menagerie*, *Harvey*, *I Remember Mama*, *Life With Father*, *The Voice Of The Turtle*, and the like.

Behrman, who once wrote such plays, is, however, another who does not seem to believe it and who has lost the favor of his erstwhile admiring customers. In this latest exhibit, he occupies himself with the plight of the workers and with the cruelty and injustice of capitalistic enterprise and simultaneously occupies his audience with the tiresome plight in which it finds itself. Instead of allowing his audiences to sense that injustice through the inner operations of his play, he not only senses it for them but, to make doubly sure that they get it, hits them over the head with it, and with enough words to stagger a Noah Webster.

A good illustration of the kind of play which succeeds with its customers despite its propaganda is *State Of The Union*. Though the play is no slightest shakes from a critical point of view and nettles the judicious, it is a very nobby job in slick Broadway showmanship. Its argument, in terms of a political idealist in conflict with self-seeking politicians who would run him for the Presidential nomination to their own ends, is, as already stated, that it is up to the American people at large to seize the reins for a change and see to it that their government is operated to the greater profit of the nation. That argument, in the hands of the usual propaganda playwright, would be sternly imposed upon an audience through extended speeches and general rhetorical fireworks, which would leave the audience where they found it. The Messrs. Lindsay and Crouse, on the other hand, reduce the speeches to a minimum and entertain their content into the audience with an embroidery of sex, gags, stage business, and just about everything else except maybe trained seals and acrobats. Many of their dodges are pretty shameless but, while criticism may groan, the popular trade ingests them as if they were so much delicious caviar. The scenes include even the one in which the angry wife makes up a bed on the floor supposedly for herself, then makes her husband take it and hops into the real bed; the dinner in the hotel room with comedy business by the waiter; the one between the wife and the other woman, which has figured in one form or another in at least a thousand plays, many of them written by amateurs who

think that Pinero is a Coney Island boardwalk game; and, among a lot of others, the final one in which the wife triumphs over her rival in her husband's affections and goes hand-in-hand to meet the future with him. But, as remarked, however much professional criticism may blanch at it all, the popular trade seems to love it, and swallows its hokum-frosted propaganda hook, line and stinker, and turns it into a box-office Pactolus. If and when the play shows signs of letting down at the ticket-till, doubtless all the authors will have to do to boost it again will be to put Sinatra in the hotel waiter's role and have him sing a blues song. It will seem to be just as much a part of the dramatic essence of their play as almost anything else they have presently got in it.

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## HOME OF THE BRAVE. DECEMBER 27, 1945

*A play by Arthur Laurents. Produced by Lee Sabinson and William R. Katzell for 68 performances in the Belasco Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

CAPT. HAROLD BITTERGER	T. J.	Russell Hardie
Eduard Franz	CONEY	Joseph Fevney
MAJOR DENNIS ROBINSON, JR.	FINCH	Henry Barnard
Kendall Clark	MINGO	Alan Baxter

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *Hospital room. A Pacific base.* Scene 2. *Office. The base.* Scene 3. *A clearing. A Pacific island.* Act II. Scene 1. *Another clearing. The island.* Scene 2. *Hospital room.* Scene 3. *The clearing.* Act III. Scene 1. *The hospital room.* Scene 2. *The hospital room.* Scene 3. *The office.*

Director: Michael Gordon.

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THE PLAY deals with "the Army's medical process used to combat psychological shock by making the patient relive the experiences that caused his condition." Employing the flash-back technique, it pictures a young Jewish soldier's loss of motive power in Pacific jungle warfare when a buddy, hitherto friendly to him, reflects on his race and when a feeling of satisfaction, subsequently realized by him as deep guilt, overcomes him upon the other's death at the hands of the Japanese. An Army psychiatrist eventually effects a narcosynthesis cure by dredging up from the soldier's mind the basic reasons for his condition and by illuminating them for him. The guilt which the soldier feels, not only in connection with racial prejudice but in the theory of his cowardice, explains the psychiatrist, is a guilt felt equally by many soldiers and also by many civilians. "Sure, it's a disease," he says, "a disease we have at home in our own country, but if you can cure yourself you can help cure them, too."

The author is a writer of scripts for the radio, an assignment also imposed upon him after his induction into the

Army. His play, while an uncompromising and honest effort, shows some of the effects of his profession in the nature of its psychiatrist's homilies on the evils of war and its protagonist's discourses on prejudice and bigotry, and in its conventional picture of the rich and unthinking villain and such stereotypes as the letter to the grief-stricken soldier announcing that his wife is about to leave him for another. It strains further to expand what would be the limited radio playing time into the longer theatrical playing time. The play ends properly at the conclusion of its middle act with the psychiatric cure of the soldier. The third act, which is wholly redundant, is added simply to keep up the final curtain until eleven o'clock. What would so be a better play if confined to two acts becomes wrecked upon its unnecessary third. It is not the first one whose subscription to chronological tradition has wrought havoc with it.

The local prejudice against short plays, or at least plays that do not arbitrarily consume the established period between half past eight and eleven, has done as much harm to the drama as the prejudice in favor of short sentences has done to literate drama criticism. The latter has gone to the length of venerating only such critical writing as is made up of sentences which resemble digested college cheers or whippet races and in which anything remotely resembling flowing literary grace is invisible. If Bernard Shaw were still in critical service and operating on this side of the Atlantic, he would be sent back to Coventry for any such sentence as this, for example, from his review of *All's Well That Ends Well*:

"Their (the players and playgoers) appreciation of Shakespeare is sheer hypocrisy, the proof being that where an early play of his is revived, they take the utmost pains to suppress as much of it as possible, and disguise the rest past recognition, relying for success on extraordinary scenic attractions, on very popular performers, including, if possible, a famously beautiful actress in the leading part, and, above all, on Shakespeare's reputation and the consequent submission of the British public to be mercilessly

bored by each of his plays once in their lives, for the sake of being able to say they have seen it."

An American critic, if he wishes to make a hit with his readers, must write a similar opinion in this fashion:

"Their liking of Shakespeare is buncombe. The proof is simple. An early play of his is revived. What happens? They rupture themselves. They cut it all they can. They put a falseface on the rest. They rely for success on fancy scenery. And pet actors. Preferably a famous beauty in the lead. And, above all, on the Bard's reputation. The public is a gull for that. It may be bored. But it likes to pretend that it is in the know."

The prejudice against plays that are not of the standard length has similarly done its damage. The public has long indicated that it will not lay out its money for a play, however good, that does not keep it in a theatre for at least two and a half hours, even if a considerable share of the two and a half hours bores it stiff and if a curtailed period would enliven it and the play no end. Since the curtain-raiser, or one-act play, which is employed abroad to fill out an evening when the main play is a relatively short one, is unacceptable in this country, producers and playwrights are often forced to pad out the main attraction, in the interest of quantity, like one of the old Beef Trust girls. It is thus that many a play which would provide passable entertainment if confined to, say, an hour or an hour and a half is transformed into a two hour and a half dead-weight.

Even some of the better plays suffer from the practice. When you read, as you frequently do, that a playwright has had "third act trouble," you may sympathize with him. His trouble often is that the third act is an unnecessary appendage to his play, that his play has said all it has to say in the two previous acts, and that he simply has to tack on the extra act to cover the necessary playing time. It is small wonder, accordingly, that third acts every once in a while torture their authors' ingenuity.

As you have gleaned, I liked van Druten's comedy, *The Mermaids Singing*, even though few others did and it con-

sequently turned out to be a box-office failure. I liked its first act, its second act, and, to a lesser degree, its third act and all. But I would have liked it a lot better, as I am sure that those who did not like it also might have, if that third act had been omitted and its essence incorporated into the second act. Van Druten doubtless knew this as well as the next man, but he was helpless in the face of theatrical tradition, and that tradition took its extra toll of his play.

The play, a sex comedy, was in the vein of the better French pieces of a kind. But the authors of the latter have not felt themselves bound to stretch out their comedies to the breaking point and have been wise enough to bring down the final curtains while things have still been going strong — and French audiences have been wise enough in turn to allow them to bring the curtains down. Some of Guitry's best comedies have run for not more than an hour and a half. Some of the others by French comedy playwrights like Hennequin (*The Habit Of A Lackey*, for example) have not run any longer. Yet an hour and a half comedy, though it were thoroughly amusing, would in all probability not last any longer on the local stage than the time it required for the storehouse wagon to come around.

The situation is not confined to light comedies. Various serious plays would similarly profit by letting their audiences go home anywhere from half an hour to three-quarters of an hour earlier. *Strange Fruit* is one. As noted in an earlier chapter, the story is of Negro prejudice in the South and revolves about the love of a white boy for the colored girl with whom he played in childhood and the tragedy that befalls. The forces which bring about this tragedy are the forces of bigotry in the typical small Southern town in which the action is laid. So far, so good. If the authors had limited their play to the direct issue in hand and had made a simple, compact drama out of it, their exhibit would have managed its purpose with considerable effect. That purpose was to show the injustice to the Negro in an unthinking white man's world. But, instead of being content to write their play in that wise, they thought it necessary, as I have already pointed out, to show their

whole small town in its various phases, and the result was enough gratuitous padding to make a sideshow thin man look like Man Mountain Dean. The secondary result was to prolong the play beyond audience comfort and to murder what drive and interest it might otherwise have had. Time and again, just as things were about to get fairly lively, the authors would bring on extraneous small town characters and have them indulge in so much conversational atmosphere that when the vital dialogue showed up again it had lost all connective force. About the only thing that was omitted in the senseless effort to picture the whole community was the local fire department. Under the circumstances, a play that might have proved fairly holding if three-quarters of an hour shorter was prolonged to the point where its interest was completely dissipated.

Speaking of plays like this one in which the ruckus proceeds from the love of a white man for a Negro girl, or vice versa, I have wondered why someone has not thought of the novelty of writing such a play in which the love story would be allowed to follow its course with absolutely no reference on the part of any of the characters to the difference in the protagonists' color. In other words, to treat it exactly as if both were of the same race, and without the slightest hullabaloo. I mentioned the notion to my friend Eugene O'Neill. "It's all right as far as it goes," he muttered, "but it wouldn't get over. The audience would insist to itself that the girl was a Creole."

The padding of exhibits to make them cover the established theatre playing time is also noticeable in many of the musical shows. This accounts for the surplus of soul-destroying ballets which latterly have gone a long way toward botching shows that would be a deal more entertaining without them. Take, for instance, *The Day Before Spring*. It is a very pleasant show up to two points in the evening. At those points someone has inserted ballets lasting for a full twenty minutes each, and each of those twenty minutes seems excessively long enough to allow the audience to go out to the nearest bar and get drunk, which, in view of the quality of the ballets, wouldn't be such a bad



idea. The ballets are, to put it mildly, dreadful and ruin the good impression made by the show's other elements. As observed earlier, they purportedly picture, so far as anyone can make out, what the life of the heroine would be like if she remained with her husband or if she eloped with her lover. They are so silly, what with both picturings involving the already alluded to pair of ballet dancers galloping around the stage like hysterical antelopes, that the only conclusion the audience arrives at is that the heroine would be better off if she left both her husband and lover and spent the rest of her life at a rest cure. Since the heroine is played by the attractive Irene Manning, this, obviously, would be a dirty shame.

If the ballets were cut out, the show in its shorter form would seem twice as good. But our audiences, to repeat, seem arbitrarily to demand two and a half or three hours' worth for their money, even if forty minutes of the time puts them to sleep. One of these days a producer will put on some such Continental musical as Walter Kollo's *His Majesty's Levee* which hasn't a ballet in it from beginning to end, which sings its happy say in less than two hours' time, and which will surprise audiences into the merry realization that entertainment does not necessarily consist in sitting in a theatre until it is time for the milkman to make his rounds.

Because of this theatrical propensity to wait around for the milkman, however trying the circumstances, our stage is deprived of the pleasure of many plays that might contribute to its richer satisfaction: the short plays of such dramatists as Strindberg, Synge, Yeats, Lady Gregory, Maeterlinck (whose short plays are the superior of his longer ones), Dunsany, Robinson, *et al.* As a nation, we are hospitable to many short things, among them the drink called the cocktail, the "shorts" in underwear, the quick lunch, the short story, even the short-short story, the literary digest, and plenty of others. But, when it comes to entertainment, we demand extra length above almost everything. If the public isn't given two pairs of pants with every dramatic suit, it sulks. What it wants, though it un-

man it, are six-day bicycle races, three and a half hour movie epics, marathon dance contests, shop-window human automatons who do not visibly move a muscle for twenty-four hours, and other such absurdities. And in the theatre what it wants, though it also may occasionally unman it, are plays and shows that are foolishly driven to expand themselves with deceptively delayed first curtains, protracted intermissions, and like time-bridges to eleven o'clock. To say nothing of scenes sometimes paced so slowly that one fears the actors have become suddenly paralyzed, extrinsic stage business imposed upon the play simply to kill time, meaningless stage crossings and other such directorial dodges, extended meditations on the part of the actors, and enough ridiculous dramatic pauses to suffice a hundred circus acrobats.

Their unquestioned quality undoubtedly had much less to do with the success of such plays as O'Neill's *Strange Interlude* and *Mourning Becomes Electra* than their mere great length. Maurice Evans' uncut *Hamlet*, which ran for all hours, was a box-office sensation. One of these days a producer will put on a play that runs from four o'clock in the afternoon until four the next morning and will probably make a million dollars. If he adds several awful ballets to the play for extra measure and it runs until five o'clock, he will probably make two million.

The company presenting the Laurents play was a capable one, as was the direction. Ralph Alswang's settings were picturesque, but the turn-table stage upon which they were placed was insufficiently screened at stage left and privileged the audience a somewhat disturbing view of the stagehands leisurely eating ham sandwiches while the guerilla jungle warfare was taking place fifteen feet to the right.

## SHOW BOAT. JANUARY 5, 1946

*A revival of the musical play, derived from Edna Ferber's novel of the same name, by Oscar Hammerstein II and Jerome Kern. Produced by the latter for a rest of the season's run in the Ziegfeld Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

WINDY	Scott Moore	ATA	Alma Sutton
STEVE	Robert Allen	MALA	Claude Marchant
PETE	Selden Bennett	BORA	Talley Beatty
QUEENIE	Helen Dowdy	LANDLADY	Sara Floyd
PARTHY ANN HAWES	Ethel Owen	ETHEL	Assota Marshall
CAPTAIN ANDY	Ralph Dumke	SISTER	Sheila Hogan
ELLIE	Colette Lyons	MOTHER SUPERIOR	Iris Manley
FRANK	Buddy Ebsen	KIM (CHILD)	Alyce Mace
RUBBER FACE	Francis Mahoney	JAKE	Max Showalter
JULIE	Carol Bruce	JIM	Jack Daley
GAYLORD RAVENAL		MAN WITH GUITAR	
	Charles Fredericks		Thomas Bowman
VALLON	Ralph Chambers	DOORMAN AT TROCADERO	
MAGNOLIA	Jan Clayton		William C. Smith
JOE	Kenneth Spencer	LOTTIE	Nancy Kenyon
BACKWOODSMAN	Howard Frank	DOLLY	Lydia Fredericks
JEB	Duncan Scott	SALLY	Bettina Thayer
SAL	Pearl Primus	KIM (IN HER TWENTIES)	
SAM	Laverne French		Jan Clayton
FATIMA	Jean Reeves	OLD LADY ON LEVEE	
OLD SPORT	Willie Torpey		Frederica Slemmons
STRONG WOMAN	Paula Kaye	JIMMY CRAIG	Charles Tate
DAHOMY QUEEN	Pearl Primus		

**SYNOPSIS:** Act I. Scene 1. *The levee at Natchez on the Mississippi. In the eighties.* Scene 2. *Kitchen pantry of the "Cotton Blossom."* Five minutes later. Scene 3. *Auditorium and stage of the "Cotton Blossom."* One hour later. Scene 4. *Box office, on foredeck.* Three weeks later. Scene 5. *Auditorium and stage during the third act of "The Parson's Bride" that night.* Scene 6. *The top deck. Later that night.* Scene 7. *The levee of Greenville. Next morning.* Act II. Scene 1. *The Midway Plaisance, Chicago World's Fair, 1893.* Scene 2. *A room on Ontario Street, 1904.* Scene 3. *Rehearsal room, Trocadero Music Hall. A few days later.* Scene 4. *St. Agatha's Convent. About the same time.* Scene 5. *Trocadero Music*

Hall. Just before midnight. New Year's Eve, 1905. Scene 6. Stern of the Show Boat, 1927. Scene 7. Top deck of the "Cotton Blossom." That night. Scene 8. Levee at Greenville. The next night.

Director: Hassard Short.

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THE REVIVAL is what the gentlemen who review plays and shows in the sticks would describe as "a cause for rejoicing," a phrase employed by them whenever a celebrated Broadway star appears in their midst and gives a performance that she wouldn't dare to give in New York, save behind a net. It is a cause for rejoicing because it shows up all the new musicals as sunlight shows up complexions and moonlight, idiots. Its story and its melody remain among our musical stage's treasures and now, if Mr. Hammerstein and the spirit of the late lamented Jerry Kern will only revive their *Music In The Air* also, the gentlemen who review shows in the larger cities may reconsider doubly the superlatives which they have visited upon some such more recent an exhibit as *Oklahoma!*

It is a lovely, insinuating, honestly romantic, and uncommonly tuneful show, this *Show Boat*, and its virtue is that it not only brings back delicate and desirable memories to us oldsters but induces delicate and desirable expectations in those younger ones who are seeing it for the first time. Its sentiment is not the purple-lighted sighing of most such shows; its romance is not the usual merchandise of sawdust tenors and cotton-stuffed sopranos; its songs are not the orchestration of the customary lot of saxophones and pseudo-Richard Tauber laryngeal gulps. And, while its comedy may here and there scarcely contribute to admiration, it nevertheless is hardly of the more miscellaneous type that involves the mention of Felix Frankfurter, the mistaking of the ladies' room for the gents' room, and such jocosities as are associated with brassières, men's multicolored underdrawers, and women's hats decorated with radishes and carrots.

When the show was first produced nineteen years ago,

part of the tributes to it were founded on the belief that it dealt for a novel and welcome change with a period in American history, to wit, the early Mississippi show boat days. It was a relief, it was argued, to be done at last with Balkan princesses, gay Paree, and all other such staples. That it was a relief, there is no denying, though certainly one or two of the Balkan princess shows were not entirely to be sneezed at and though *The Merry Widow*, among some other gay Paree shows, was all that anyone save the most chauvinistic imbecile could desire. But the idea that *Show Boat* blazed anything like a new path was infirm. There had been various shows in the years long before that treated of elements in American history, among them those of early Manhattan Knickerbocker days like *The Burgomaster*, of Civil War days like *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*, etc. There had been even shows like Ludwig Englander's 1776 at the old Irving Place Theatre.

Yet this *Show Boat* is also uncommonly gratifying in other directions. In the first place, one really believes in its love story. In most musicals, even in some of the better ones, if the music didn't distract and hypnotize one into suspending judgment it wouldn't for a moment be believable that any such donkey as the hero could conceivably arouse tender passions in the heroine or that even any such fudgebox as the latter could operate likewise in the case of the aforesaid half-wit. The story of Magnolia and Gaylord Ravenal — incidentally as savory a name as will be found in the whole musical show catalogue — does, however, somehow succeed in pleasing one that one forgot to bring along a tomato. It has tenderness and charm, and over it hovers the scent of years that were gentle.

In the second place, there is inherent in the book a color seldom encountered in most shows. In these others the missing color is optimistically relegated to the costumes, scenery, and lighting effects. In *Show Boat* it emanates not only from the dialogue but from the music. The exhibit creates a mood in one not through the extrinsic instrumentality of electric moons, tinsel stars, and the other machinery of Broadway heartbreak, but from within. And in

the third place, and above all, while it is not the only show of its kind that has done so, it confidently invites response without resort to those vaudeville specialty acts, arty ballets and other irrelevancies which are included in most musicals. It recognizes its beginning, middle and end, and it sticks more or less resolutely to them.

In the case of any revival, musical or dramatic, there is an understandable impulse to compare the immediate performers with those who have preceded them. At least in the case of the revival of any play or show within the experience of the same audience, though the impulse seems sometimes eccentrically to possess people who never saw the original production and goes to the extreme of causing them to disparage players in favor of others who were on the stage when they themselves were still being pricked by diaper pins. There is the collateral and also understandable impulse on the part of persons who have actually seen the earlier productions sometimes to imagine that the present players are not so good as the previous ones. I say understandable because the first identification of a player with a role is something that remains fixed in the memory, and because what is fixed in the memory often arbitrarily takes on a value that may or may not be bogus. Memory is frequently an amateur magician that persists in fooling one with its ten-cent parlor tricks. It is thus, for example, that recollection's legend maintains in some folk the conviction that Lillian Russell and Maxine Elliott were still as beautiful in their late years as any youthful Irene Bentley or Lotta Faust, that Jimmie Powers was a peerless comedian, that every girl in Florenz Ziegfeld's *Follies* was inordinately and transcendently lovely, and that Nat Goodwin could act.

The present company, except for the Captain Andy, Parthy Ann and Frank, is for the most part quite as good as that in the original presentation in 1927 and as that in the revival of 1932. In certain particulars, notably in Charles Fredericks as Ravenal and Jan Clayton as Magnolia, it is much superior. And while Carol Bruce and Kenneth Spencer in the roles of the half-caste Julie and "Ol'

Man River" Joe may have to battle against the recollections of Helen Morgan, Jules Bledsoe and Paul Robeson, they nonetheless fill their assignments with entire critical satisfaction. Hassard Short, at last abandoning his penchant for scarlet fever stage lighting, has directed the production, with its hardly Urban sets by Howard Bay, ably.

In a word, when our theatre goes backward it sometimes goes forward. Just as *Pygmalion* is a considerably more delightful comedy than any of the new ones produced in this season, so is *Show Boat* a considerably more delightful musical than any of the new ones produced in the last fourteen, which is to say since *Music In The Air*.

## A JOY FOREVER. JANUARY 7, 1946

*A comedy by Vincent McConnor. Produced by Blevins Davis and Archie Thomson for 16 performances in the Biltmore Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

TINA	Dorothy Sands	WALLACE	Joe Johnson
FRITH	Charles Laffin	MRS. TILLERY	Frieda Altman
BENJAMIN VINNICUM	Guy Kibbee	GUARD	Rollin Bauer
YOUNG DAN	William Nunn	ALLORA EAMES	Natalie Schafer
OLD DAN	Seth Arnold	MODEL	Charles Boaz, Jr.
CONSTANCE SHERMAN		DELIVERY MAN	Fred Knight
	Ottillie Kruger	ASSISTANT DELIVERY MAN	
HARRISON EAMES	Loring Smith		Lucian Self
ARCHER BARRINGTON	Nicholas Joy	MRS. DANFORTH	Lois Bolton

**SYNOPSIS:** *The studio of Benjamin Vinnicum, overlooking Fort Tryon Park, in New York City. Act I. Scene 1. A morning in March. Scene 2. Several hours later. Act II. Scene 1. One week later. Scene 2. Several hours later. Act III. The following morning.*

**Director:** *Reginald Denham.*

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**W**HAT THE AUTHOR very evidently hoped to write was a comedy about an eccentric old painter and his equally eccentric ménage and friends that would touch drolly upon the borders of the fantastic. To wit, the kind of play that Saroyan has at times accomplished so well, and that the early Clare Kummer contrived though her elliptical wit and humor. But the job has been beyond him and, though he manages some amusing moments, his play bogs down in its fancyless invention. It is thus that the comical spectacle of his great but neglected artist turned advertising sandwich-man for a chop suey restaurant is followed by the exanimate business in which the artist solemnly advises an eager young girl to give up her attempts at creative art, go back and marry the young man she loves, and "create life." It is thus further that a humorous passage in which the old painter and his crony concoct an elaborately outlandish



drink is followed by the mildewed one about the goat who had a paint brush tied to his tail, swished it against a canvas, and produced a painting that fooled all the art critics and won the grand prix. And it is thus also that the diverting character of an old codger who is determined to die on his seventy-eighth birthday, as all his male relatives did before him, and who goes out to doll up his grave every day is balanced by the jogtrot one of the flirtatious woman married to a rich old oaf who makes passes at any symmetrical young man she encounters.

The evening is additionally troubled at intervals by such of its author's philosophical animadversions as "One thing missing in life's painting is life itself" and "To live, one must die many times." It is apparent that he believes that any play which deals with art and artists, particularly if its title be derived, like this one, from Keats, will inevitably be an artistic play. The belief was seemingly shared by Guy Kibbee, who had deserted the stage for Hollywood fifteen years before and who, though he gave on this return an entertaining performance in the leading role of Jo Davidson as he might be acted by Monty Woolley, proved that his long immersion in the film factories, as is so often the case, had blunted his ability to distinguish between a poor play and a good one.

Which brings us to a personal matter. The commonest question asked of a professional critic, usually by men who spend their nights at home or in restaurants filling helpless women's ears with nonsense, exercising their brains over small pieces of cardboard or reading the novels of James Hilton, is how he conceivably can go to the theatre regularly and waste his time in looking at so many bad plays. Since it would be profitless to intimate to them that many of the plays which he finds bad — plays, for example, like *Abie's Irish Rose*, *Junior Miss*, *Seventh Heaven*, *Peg o' My Heart*, *Brother Rat*, *What A Life!*, *Room Service*, *et al.* — have by their record runs proved to be exactly the kind which the interrogators would undoubtedly find to their enthusiastic taste, there is nothing for the defendant to do

but to allow that very possibly he is crazy, and to let it go at that, which satisfies the bores completely.

These latter, while they can not for the life of them understand how any man can continue an interest in the theatre when he is forced to see four poor plays for every passable one and four passable plays for maybe one good one, nevertheless accept with wholesome contentment and ultimate pleasure a similar ratio in the matter of social affairs, books, and what not else, including, God forbid, even moving pictures. And, more important, the plays which they speak of as being bad and which fail are often the plays which a critic esteems, as, for example, in recent seasons *Outrageous Fortune*, *A Highland Fling*, *Love's Old Sweet Song*, *Suds In Your Eye*, *The Beautiful People*, *A Sound Of Hunting*, *The Mermaids Singing*, and so on.

The theory that the critical profession should weary of the theatre because of its numerous poor plays is sister to the idea that the medical profession should weary of itself because it has to deal with so many ill patients. Treating bad plays to the constructive ministrations of criticism is no different, essentially, from treating bad health to the constructive ministrations of medicine. It is part of the eerie fascination of the theatre, and of the critical craft. The bad play, furthermore, is not always without its amusement rewards. It bears in this respect a close relation to the eccentric entertainment in such things as get-the-hook vaudeville and the greased-pig chase. The wanton chuckles and guffaws induced by some such solemn stinker as *Boudoir*, *Popsy*, or *Marriage Is For Single People* are of a volume scarcely matched by those evoked by such intentional comedies and farces as *Kiss And Tell*, *Dear Ruth*, or *Janie*.

Even when it is not good, the theatre has an answer in the words of Goethe for the mentally bewhiskered who elect to disparage it. "Any one who is sufficiently young and who is not quite spoiled," said Goethe, "could not easily find any place that would suit him so well as a theatre. No one asks you any questions; you need not open your mouth unless you choose; on the contrary, you sit

quite at your ease like a king, and let everything pass before you, and recreate your mind and senses to your heart's content. There is poetry, there is painting, there are singing and music, there is acting, and what not besides. When all these arts, and the charm of youth and beauty heightened to an important degree, work in concert on the same evening, it is a bouquet to which no other can compare. But even when part is bad and part is good, it is still better than looking out of the window, or playing a game of whist in a close party amid the smoke of cigars."

Returning to the play under scrutiny, additional oblique amusement was provided by Stewart Chaney's setting of the impoverished painter's studio which contained enough bass-voils, glass-enclosed antiques and other valuables to net him the living money the play alleged he desperately needed, to say nothing of by Reginald Denham's direction which had the actors parading around the stage and in and out of doors as if the studio were a Memorial Day reviewing stand.

## THE DESERT SONG. JANUARY 8, 1946

*A revival of the 1926 musical exhibit by Sigmund Romberg, with book by Oscar Hammerstein II and Frank Mandel. Produced by Russell Lewis and Howard Young for 46 performances in the City Center Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

MINDAR	<i>Edward Wellman</i>	EDITH	<i>Tamara Page</i>
SID EL KAR	<i>Richard Charles</i>	SUSAN	<i>Sherry O'Neil</i>
AHMED	<i>Stanley Wolfe</i>	MARDI	<i>Barbara Bailey</i>
OMAR	<i>Jack Saunders</i>	FLORETTE	<i>Betina Orth</i>
HASSI	<i>Thayer Roberts</i>	YVONNE	<i>Maria Taweel</i>
PIERRE BIRABEAU	<i>Walter Cassel</i>	MARGOT BONVALET	
BENJAMIN KIDD	<i>Jack Goode</i>		<i>Dorothy Sandlin</i>
SENTINEL	<i>William Bower</i>	GENERAL BIRABEAU	
CAPTAIN PAUL FONTAINE			<i>Lester Matthews</i>
	<i>Wilton Clary</i>	CLEMENTINA	<i>Jean Bartel</i>
SERGEANT LE VERNE		HAREM GUARD	<i>Richard Hughes</i>
	<i>Joseph Claudio</i>	ALI BEN ALI	<i>George Burnson</i>
SERGEANT DE BOUSSAC		NOGI	<i>Louis DeMagnus</i>
	<i>Antonio Rovano</i>	RIFF RUNNER	<i>Paul Ruth</i>
AZURI	<i>Clarissa</i>		

**SYNOPSIS:** Act I. Scene 1. *Hiding place of the Red Shadow in the Riff mountains. Evening.* Scene 2. *Garden outside General Birabeau's villa. Before dawn next day.* Scene 3. *Inside General Birabeau's villa. That afternoon.* Act II. Scene 1. *The desert retreat of Ali Ben Ali. Afternoon of following day.* Scene 2. *The corridor to the bath.* Scene 3. *The room of the silken couch.* Scene 4. *The edge of the desert.* Scene 5. *General Birabeau's villa. Two days later. Time. 1925. Place. North Africa.*

Director: *Sterling Holloway.*

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**T**HE REVIVAL reminds us that it is now two or three decades since what may be termed the turban period in the entertainment arts afflicted the nation. It was then that the mere sight of an actor adorned with such headgear inscrutably induced spasms of romantic ecstasy in the womenfolk and, somewhat less inscrutably, of a more abdominal nature in their men. The fascination of the exotic millinery on the part of the ladies became so acute that not only plays

and shows including it were rushed into the market, but novels, movies and even songs in which the heroes wore their nightshirts upside down were heaved onto the bourse along with them.

It all began, if I remember rightly, with a novel called *The Sheik*, a hideous package of garbage in which a handsome young Englishman of noble birth was stolen by Arabs in his childhood, became one of their turbaned tribe and, sun-tanned like six days in a Terminal barbershop, seized female readers up out of their Grand Rapids chairs and carried them off across the blazing Sahara to a fate more acceptable than death. And it was not long thereafter that canny caterers to the girls' taste got busy in all directions and presently supplied them with so many swarthy gallants in towel marquees that the scene took on the appearance of a conclave of the Grand Commandery of the Knights Templar, Algerian chapter.

The earliest of the plays with its hero's face covered with walnut juice and his head with a twined diaper was, as I recall, Edgar Selwyn's *The Arab* in which the late lamented Edgar purveyed himself in the hot role. It is related of him that, after the play had been running a while, he one night stole a look at himself in his dressing-room mirror, exclaimed, "What goddamned foolishness!" wiped off his makeup at the end of the performance, and closed the show.

Not only the stage but also the movies dosed up the girls with the stuff. Valentino came along with a film version of the aboriginal novel and as its sheik hero had women far and wide foaming at the mouth like so many seidels of Würzburger. French Legion pictures with Gary Cooper in an Anne Boleyn headdress being passionately followed into the desert by a barefoot Marlene Dietrich drew such female crowds that the screen houses nigh burst at the seams. The circuses obeyed the trend and even the one-elephant shows went after the easy money with erstwhile Jap tight-rope walkers dressed up as Bedouins and quondam German acrobats in the guise of Morocco camel drivers. Tin Pan Alley for the time being stopped stealing from Chopin and

began manufacturing wood-wind horrors like "The Sheik Of Araby," which were wailed by night, to desultory piano accompaniments and the agony of the neighbors, from one end of the land to the other, with gratuitous encores of "'Til The Sands Of The Desert Grow Cold."

The girls seem to have changed a lot since those years. What they appear to admire today are not men embellished by turbans but men who go about hatless and with nothing at all on their heads, duly contract pneumonia, and can no longer bother them. It is thus that any such relic as *The Desert Song* now seems to them, as to the men who whimsically remember their one-time romantic neurosis, to be excessively silly. And in any such wretched production as here accorded it something, to boot, of a theatrical pox.

Romberg's music remains largely what it was originally: orchestrated mayonnaise. And the book with its "Their horses were too fast for us" cast of dialogue and the lyrics by the then amateur Oscar Hammerstein II remain similarly the product of pens dipped in artificial and synthetic moonlight.

The memento was followed, on April 7, by a repeat engagement of *Carmen Jones* for a four weeks' run.

# THE WOULD-BE GENTLEMAN

JANUARY 9, 1946

*A free version of Molière's Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme by Bobby Clark. Produced by Michael Todd for 77 performances in the Booth Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

MUSIC MASTER	Donald Burr	MADAME JOURDAIN	Edith King
DANCING MASTER	Alex Fisher	FENCING MASTER	Earl MacVeigh
CRIQUE	Fred Werner	PHILOSOPHER	Frederic Persson
NICOLE	Ann Thomas	COUNT DORANTE	Gene Barry
MARCEL	Rand Elliot	LUCILLE JOURDAIN	
BAPTISTE	Albert Henderson		Eleanore Whitney
MONSIEUR JOURDAIN	Bobby Clark	COVIELLE	Leonard Elliott
MADemoiselle VALERE		CLEONTE	John Heath
	Ruth Harrison	TAILOR	LeRoi Operti
	Constance Brigham	RAYMOND	Lester Towne
SINGERS {	Mary Godwin	MARQUISE DORIMENE	June Knight
	Lewis Pierce		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Drawing-room in Monsieur Jourdain's house in Paris — circa 1670. Act II. Same as Act I. (Immediately following.)

Director: John Kennedy.

THE CHIEF OBJECTIONS to the alterations made in the minor classic issued from pundits who never go to the theatre and who, if they did, would certainly not be likely to attend Bobby Clark in it, whether amended or intact, and from out of town play reviewers who previously had endorsed as first-rate drama *The Ryan Girl* and *The Secret Room*. The aforesaid pundits, it need hardly be remarked, were not the authentic scholars, since scholarship in its intricate travels generally acquires some critical humor, but the solemn fowl who arbitrarily shout down any treatment of the classics or semi-classics, however soundly wrought, which is not the usual and time-honored one. Their shouting down often indicates only the emptiness of their pretensions. They seemed to be unaware, in this specific case,

that Molière himself borrowed, as has Clark, from one or more of his plays for another, that he at times freely improvised, that his stage was periodically given to burlesque, and that he took extravagant liberties not only with some of his own satirical comedies but, even more so, with the plays of others which served occasionally as his source materials. They also seemed to be wholly oblivious of the fact that, when they decry anything resembling the slightest amendment of Shakespeare, they betray their dramaturgical insensibility. As James Agate, to cite one example, has pointed out, "To crowd their good things is a common fault even with good writers, good dramatists, and good improvisers. Even Shakespeare could make this mistake, as all actresses know who have essayed Beatrice. Take Benedick's line in the church scene: 'Come, bid me do any thing for thee.' Whereupon Beatrice must rap out, 'Kill Claudio.' But this is too quick, and Ellen Terry, with her unerring feeling for the stage, sensed this, with the result that the passage was made to run:

*Benedick:* Come, bid me do any thing for thee.

*Beatrice:* Anything?

*Benedick:* Anything.

*Beatrice:* Kill Claudio."

As for the pundits' handbrothers, the aforesaid critics, Clark amused himself by pointing out to such of them as protested against lines like "Zounds! What a beautiful piece of household furniture!" and "Boy, is she sparkish!" that the lines happened to be Molière's own. The pundits' handbrothers, if indeed they were acquainted with Molière at all, apparently knew him only in translation, and perhaps not too good translation at that, and could not persuade themselves that there could be more than one English shading to a French word.

That Clark has played tricks with the original, and some bold ones, is certain. "You can hardly pick a Molière play I haven't borrowed from," he says, "though most of the added lines are from *The Precious Young Ladies* (the *Précieuses Ridicules*). There were fine possibilities in the play,



but both Mike Todd and I saw immediately that if we played it just as Molière wrote it, it wouldn't work at all. For instance, he didn't have any women in the whole first act. Hell, no women in the first act — that just wouldn't go at all today."

The result of all this classroom sacrilege, which includes even traces of stage business from Hurtig and Seamon's vaudevilles, Haverly's minstrels, Gus Hill's burlesque shows, and probably even *Chu Chin Chow*, is a kind of seventeenth century *Follies* which is highly amusing, at least when the master clown Clark in the role of M. Jourdain is in operation, which is most of the time. When Molière now and then has to go it on his own without Clark's scholarly acrobatic help, things are inclined, after the passing of all these years, to be not very sprightly. But when Bobby brings into action his famous burlesque technique filtered through his previous experience in Congreve's *Love For Love* and Sheridan's *The Rivals*, God's in His heaven and all's right with the world of serious criticism on a holiday.

"You, Jean Baptiste, and Bill Shakespeare are probably sitting around up there cutting me up on account of my doing the classics for Toots Shor," Mike Todd, the producer, observed in a brochure to the trade. "I assure you that I'm not doing this in order to get a good table quick. It is because I feel that you knocked out these scripts for the Toots Shors of your day." Though King Louis XIV and his court may scarcely have been said to be the Toots Shors of their day, or Elizabeth the Mrs. Toots of hers, and though Mr. Todd's strained lowbrow humor may be quite unfunny, the show he and Clark have contrived, wittily set and costumed by Howard Bay and Irene Sharaff and appropriately directed by Mr. Kennedy, is frequently a belly-buster. The objectors to it and to Mr. Clark in it had plenty of company in Molière's own day. They similarly derided Molière's very first acting efforts in the so-called *Illustre Théâtre*. They scoffed at his later paraphrases of Italian comedy and farce. They hooted at his *Don Garcie*. They denounced as an offense against morals his *The School For Husbands*. They indignantly objected to his *Les Fâcheux*,

or *The Bores*. They condemned as immoral his *The School For Wives*. The King himself, who was his patron saint, barred a public production of his satire on religious hypocrisy, *Tartuffe*, and it was only after five years and after considerable rewriting that the presentation was allowed. They further sneered at him and later heaped obloquy upon him for that play. They violently condemned his *Don Juan* as libidinous and as against God. They detested his *L'Amour Médecin* and issued pamphlets against it. They did not approve of his *The Misanthrope* and kept audiences from it for some time. They cared little or nothing for his *Amphitryon*, and said so, loudly. They vilipended his *Femmes Savantes*, or *The Learned Ladies*. And they finally denied him, upon his death, the holy rites and a decent grave in the parish cemetery, because he had been, they said, a clown.

## THE WINTER'S TALE. JANUARY 15, 1946

*The play by William Shakespeare. Produced by the Theatre Guild for 39 performances in the Cort Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

PROLOGUE	Romney Brent	PAULINA	Florence Reed
ARCHIDAMUS, A LORD OF BOHEMIA	Michael Bey	KEEPER OF THE JAIL	Michael Bey
CAMILLO, A LORD OF SICILIA	Colin Keith-Johnston	EMILIA	Genevieve Frizzell
POLIXENES, KING OF BOHEMIA	David Powell	CLEOMENES, A LORD OF SICILIA	Charles Atkin
LEONTES, KING OF SICILIA	Henry Daniell	DION, A LORD OF SICILIA	Philip Huston
HERMIONE, QUEEN TO LEONTES	Jessie Royce Landis	OLD SHEPHERD	Whitford Kane
MAMILLIUS, YOUNG PRINCE OF SICILIA	Maurice Cavell	CLOWN	Kurt Richards
1ST LADY	Denise Flynn	TIME	Philip Huston
2ND LADY	Lucille Patton	AUTOLYCUS	Romney Brent
3RD LADY	Jennifer Howard	FLORIZEL, PRINCE OF BOHEMIA	Robert Duke
1ST LORD	Baldwin McGaw	PERDITA	Geraldine Stroock
ANTIGONUS, A LORD OF SICILIA	Charles Francis	DORCAS	Jo Van Fleet
2ND LORD	Lionel Ince	MOPSA	Helen Wagner
3RD LORD	Frank Leslie	SERVANT	Victor Beecroft
		DANCING RAM	James Starbuck
		DANCING EWE	Lili Mann
		DANCING HORSEMEN	{ Francis Burnell Jules Racine

Directors: B. Iden Payne and Romney Brent.

**J**UST WHY the Theatre Guild, in its conceivably somewhat less spacious than infinite wisdom, elected to launch what it has announced as a Shakespearean program with *The Winter's Tale* jilts the critical faculties. That the Guild has been unable to make much of a theatrical evening with it is not surprising, since, in Eugene O'Neill's wry observation, neither did Shakespeare. It remains as confused and disturbing to actors, directors, and audiences as it seemingly was to its creator.

I have, in my years of critical liability, engaged various productions of the play both here and abroad. Some of them

were as good as they probably could be and others, like this one, have been something considerably less than that. But good or bad, the exhibit itself has persisted in being a potential masterpiece hopefully starting on a doomed climb to a slippery mountain peak and ending as a crippled theatrical occasion. This, of course, is what is customarily disparaged by persons with more indignation than critical intelligence as "after all, only one man's opinion," which I have the suspicion to doubt.

There are grantedly works of widely accepted merit that some persons, with all the good intentions in the world, somehow can not bring themselves to relish. Twenty or so years ago the University of Oklahoma's worthy publication, *Books Abroad*, inquired of various writers and critics which of such works they personally found it difficult to read and enjoy. The answers ranged all the way from Shakespeare through Dostoievski to Melville and from Sophocles through Thackeray to Proust. I forget the nature of my own nominations, but if in the way of drama I omitted *The Winter's Tale*, I herewith place it in the record. It is, of course, true that beauty of language may convert the silliest of fables into something of a jewel. Shakespeare on occasion has surely demonstrated as much. But in this case, except for intermittent passages, the greatest dramatist of all time nodded and the story issues forth in silliness naked and unashamed. It may be a lamentably transparent device, but I outline literally the essence of that story, omitting only the names of characters and places:

A man suspects his wife of intimacy with his best friend and in jealous rage claps her into jail and schemes to poison her theoretical seducer. The scheme doesn't work and the latter escapes the country. While in jail, the wife gives birth to a daughter who, at the man's orders, is carted off to a desert where she will presumably die from exposure. He then brings his wife to trial and, though warned of his error by a mysterious kibitzer, finds her guilty. The wife swoons and is thought to be dead, but is secretly revived by a woman friend after the funeral and spirited away, whereupon her little son expires from grief.

After a sixteen years' lapse, a young girl appears in another part of the globe. It is the daughter who was exposed to the desert elements, but who was rescued in the nick of time by a passing stranger. At a big dinner party, the man accused of adultery with her mother shows up and, when the girl announces that she and his son are to be married, cries out that he will not stand for it. The young pair skip and go back to the girl's home town, with the man still pursuing them. Her father, now contrite, is very happy to have his daughter back. His happiness is increased no end when a statue of his wife in the parlor comes to life and she crawls into his arms.

Just as musical comedy can sometimes get away with the most absurd of stories if the music and girls are sufficient distractions, so possibly might this one at least partly cajole audiences if the inventiveness and the imagination of its production were of a high and unusual order. Inventiveness and imagination, however, are here lacking. Mr. Payne, the original director, has for some years now been recognized as being so old-fashioned that chairs lend him their anti-macassars. The Guild, perceiving in the tryout period how he had handled the stage, quickly drafted a member of the acting troupe, Romney Brent, to give things a little more bounce, which he did. But sufficient souvenirs of Payne's handiwork seem to remain, and what we accordingly get impresses us as a wayward combination of rocking-chair and trampoline, with the actors trying to accommodate themselves, at one and the same time, comfortably to both.

Stewart Chaney's settings and costumes are good enough in their conventional way, but something more greatly blessed with fancy was to be desired. There is no excitement in them; we have seen their like too often before. The acting company is largely of a tatterdemalion nature. A few of the players are fairly satisfactory, but little more — and a lot are not even that. Any brilliance is absent; the whole has the air of a recited lesson, with instructed gestures.

It is the common saying on such occasions that, however grave a Shakespearean production's deficiencies, it serves the purpose of familiarizing people, chiefly school-children,

with classics which they have not seen before. This always strikes me as a dunce's argument. The most effective manner in which to discourage school-children or anyone else with the classics is, as has been said a thousand times, to present them poorly. Furthermore, just how they are expected to familiarize themselves with the classics when the presentations are garbled and cloudy eludes the understanding. It is also the common observation in connection with this *The Winter's Tale* that its violent break in tragical melodrama and comedy moods conduces to audience discomfort, and worse. There is some truth in the charge. Nevertheless, a mixture and break in tragical melodrama and comedy moods have been accepted, in *Juno and The Paycock* for just one example, with no discomfort.

Such considerations aside, what the Guild's exhibit cries for is someone like Maurice Evans or Orson Welles to give it what presently it has not. Neither would have found the job an easy one, but either might have lifted the weighed-down stage into at least a semblance of some life and color and spirit. The Shakespearean productions which succeed in this later day are those to which have been brought originality, force, and courage. The Guild's is like reading the play by a flickering oil-lamp. If it has a single palliative virtue, the casting of the roles of Hermione and Perdita with different actresses constitutes it. When, as now and then in the past, they have been played by the same actress, it has (save, I am told, in the case of Mary Anderson, who was a young woman) been altogether too much to demand of an audience that it accept Hermione, the mother, usually in the upper forties or beyond, as her own daughter in the teens. If they are going to enter into any such nonsense, it might be better to have a youthful actress play the mother rather than the other way 'round. Young actresses are frequently able to make themselves up very effectively as older women, but older women generally have a severe time of it trying to pass themselves off for dewy ones.

## A YOUNG AMERICAN. JANUARY 17, 1946

*A "tragedy of manners" by Edwin M. Bronner. Produced by the Blackfriars' Guild for 22 performances in the Blackfriars' Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

MRS. HASTINGS	Joan Field	WILLIAM FARRELL
JACOB GEISMAR	Howard Swaine	Louis Peterson, Jr.
ALEXANDER CORTELL	Alex Wilson	SOPHIE BAINES Hazel Thomas
LYNN CORTELL	Martha Jean	PROFESSOR ARNOLD HARMON
STEVEN WILLOUGHBY	Murray C. Stewart	Harry Gerard

**SYNOPSIS:** *The action takes place in the duplex apartment of Alexander Cortell, New York City. Act I. Scene 1. A late morning in autumn. Scene 2. Afternoon, four days later. Act II. Scene 1. An evening one month later. Scene 2. Several hours later. Act III. Evening, one week later.*

Director: Dennis Gurney.

**A** CELEBRATED American musician, impressed by a symphony sent to him through the mails, invites the composer to stay in his home while the work is in process of revision. The composer turns out to be a Negro, and the play thereupon revolves about the minor embarrassments and open prejudices which he encounters in the white household. One or two of the scenes are fairly well handled, but the whole suffers from the fact that the workings of the theme are obvious in advance. Clearly anticipated from previous theatrical experience are the young white bigot who, defeated by logic, resorts to violence; the musician's young daughter who takes the Negro's part; the wise teacher who, with appropriate head shakings, allows that the blame for race prejudice rests on both sides; the flashy Negress servant with her cynical *mots*; etc. And no less clearly anticipated is the conclusion that the eventual solution of the problem lies not in force or revenge but in education, understanding, and human sympathy.

*January 17, 1946*

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The author indicates some feel for drama, though too often disposed to mistake platitude for thematic spot news. The acting company and the direction were hardly to be congratulated.



# NELLIE BLY. JANUARY 21, 1946

*A musical comedy, book by Joseph Quillan, lyrics by Johnny Burke, music by James Van Heusen. Produced by Nat Karson and Eddie Cantor for 16 performances in the Adelphi Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

PULITZER	Walter Armin	HONEYMOON	{ Doris Sward
BENNETT	Edward H. Robins	COUPLE	{ Jack Voeth
NEWSBOY	William O'Shay	FRENCH GIRL	Drucilla Strain
FRANK JORDAN	William Gaxton	GRISSETTE	Lubov Roudenko
FERRY CAPTAIN	Fred Peters	FRENCH DANDY	Jack Whitney
DECKHAND	Harold Murray	FRENCH MAYOR	Walter Armin
PHINEAS T. FOGARTY	Victor Moore	SANTOS-DUMONT	Fred Peters
FIRST REPORTER	Robert Strauss	REPORTERS	The Debonairs
MURPHY	Artells Dickson	CZAR	Walter Armin
WARDHEELER	Jack Voeth	RUSSIAN CAPTAIN	Fred Peters
SECOND REPORTER	Larry Stuart	FIRST SHEIK	Robert Strauss
THIRD REPORTER	Eddy Di Genova	SECOND SHEIK	Edward H. Robins
NELLIE BLY	Joy Hodges	THIRD SHEIK	Larry Stuart
BATTLE ANNIE	Benay Venuta	OFFICIAL	Harold Murray
STEWARD	Larry Stuart	COPYGIRL	Suzie Baker

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *Barclay Street ferry slip, New York.* Scene 2. *In front of ferry house at Barclay Street.* Scene 3. *Battle Annie's saloon.* Scene 4. *City Hall Square.* Scene 5. *Steamship pier in Hoboken.* Scene 6. *The after deck.* Scene 7. *Stateroom the S.S. "Augusta Victoria."* Scene 8. *At gates of Paris Exposition.* Scene 9. *Paris Exposition.* Act II. Scene 1. *City room of the New York Herald.* Scene 2. *Stratosphere.* Scene 3. *Public square, Moscow.* Scene 4. *Street in Aden.* Scene 5. *The pass.* Scene 6. *Street in Aden.* Scene 7. *Somewhere in Texas.* Scene 8. *In transit.* Scene 9. *Barclay Street ferry slip.*

Time. 1889.

Director: Edgar MacGregor.

IT IS RELIABLY REPORTED that the musical show, *Spring In Brazil*, which failed on the road to the tune of 300,000 dollars and was not brought into New York, suffered from so much rewriting that by the time it reached Chicago the only line remaining from the original book was, properly

enough, "Good God, what an awful mess!" The insistence of the grimly vengeful leading comedian, Milton Berle, is said to have been responsible for its retention, a compromise having been effected with the show's understandably obdurate producer in the elimination of the qualifying adjective "awful."

It is also reliably reported that this *Nellie Bly*, which was nevertheless brought into New York and failed to the same 300,000 dollar tune, underwent so much outside rewriting that the original authors, the Messrs. Ryskind and Herzig, wrathfully severed all connection with it on the road when the management declined to permit them to incorporate the line from *Spring In Brazil*. Just what the natal shape of the show was, I have no direct means of knowing, but it may be allowed from first-hand observation that one of the two dozen or so final troubles with it was that most of the people connected with it did not seem to know in the least what they were talking about. The gentleman now credited with the authorship of the book, for example, appeared to have confused the story of Nellie Bly with that of Stanley and Livingstone, to have mixed up James Gordon Bennett and Emile Gauvreau, and to have mistaken Joseph Pulitzer for Adam Forepaugh. The composer very evidently imagined that the French and Russians anticipated in the 1880's the Tin Pan Alley song rhythms of the Bing Crosby Hollywood films. And so on. Even Victor Moore, with William Gaxton at the head of the show's comedian department, was bedevilled in the general vertigo. In an interview before the opening, Mr. M. delivered himself thus: "It's not a critics' show — it's an audience show. I never heard so many belly-laughs! I play an Irishman for the first time in New York."

Mr. Moore's theory that a show full of belly-laughs would not be a critics' show is news. But if he heard a lot of belly-laughs he heard something that neither the critics nor the audience did. What the latter heard were rather only abdominal rumblings over such lines as his being so green from seasickness that he could give a transfusion to spinach, and as being so ill that the rigor was just waiting for the

mortis to set in. With the sharpest of reportorial ears, one further could not detect the slightest symptom of a belly-laugh anywhere in the house following such sallies as the wonderfulness of being the idol of Paris because it let one be idle, and as the impossibility of any woman's going around the world in seventy-odd days because it would take her that long to dress. Mr. Moore was deranged about even himself. If this was the first time he had ever appeared in New York as an Irishman, Kid Burns in both *Forty-Five Minutes From Broadway* and *The Talk Of New York* must have been a Czech.

Mr. Gaxton was similarly befouled by the contagion. "I play a newspaper man again for the third or fourth time. I still dress them up." When Mr. Gaxton imagines that his Hollywood ensembles constitute a wardrobe improvement upon the journalistic scene it is evident that he never heard of such sartorial dandies of the period as George Buchanan Fife, William C. Reick, Charles Lincoln, Herbert Bayard Swope, George Cooper, Nicholas Biddle, Hamilton Peltz, Richard Harding Davis, Algernon St. John Brenon, Frank Baker, and the embossed like.

Mr. Cantor, co-producer of the show who supplied the major portion of the 300,000 dollars wasted on it, is further said to have been infected to the point of inserting into it divers additional humors which he esteemed as irresistible novelties and which amplified Mr. Moore's notion of sumptuous belly-laughs. As examples of their unsurpassed novelty may be cited a scene in which Mr. Moore was disguised as a harem siren and was made love to by an actor who believed that he was a female; another in which Mr. Moore stuffed his laundry into his bosom and observed that if he was going to drown in the sea he might as well get it washed free; still another in which Mr. Moore proclaimed that if he was lying to his female companion might St. Patrick send down a bolt of lightning and strike him, with the bolt promptly serving as a blackout; another still in which the desperately seasick and undone Mr. Moore was told "You give up too easily," with his retort, "I'll say I do!"; another yet in which Mr. Moore, carrying a pail of beer, was ap-

prised that "It has a head on it" and his inquiry, "Is it anybody I know?"; and such jocosities as "There's a south south-easter blowing from the north-west."

The first musical show use of the Jules Verne around-the-world-in-eighty-days idea was in an exhibit of that name at Niblo's Garden in 1885. It was apparently employed so well that the show became such a hit that various travesties, among them snacks like *Around Chicago In Eighty Minutes*, appeared right and left. They seemingly did things much better in those days. *Nellie Bly* found itself in the unfortunate predicament of going around the world backwards.

# THE MAGNIFICENT YANKEE

JANUARY 22, 1946

*A biographical play by Emmet Lavery. Produced by Arthur Hopkins for the season's run in the Royale Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

DIXON	Mason Curry	OWEN WISTER	Sherling Oliver
MR. JUSTICE HOLMES		NORTROP	Philip Truex
	Louis Calhern	HAMILTON	Robert Healy
FANNY DIXWELL HOLMES		MR. JUSTICE BRANDEIS	
	Dorothy Gish		Edgar Barrier
HENRY ADAMS	Fleming Ward	MAPES	Grey Stafford
COPELAND	Christopher Martin	ROGERS	Edward Hudson
MASON	Nicholas Saunders	JACKSON	Edwin Whitner
MARY	Eleanor Swayne	HALLORAN	Bruce Bradford
MR. PALMER, OF THE TRANSCRIPT			
	William Roerick		

**SYNOPSIS:** *The entire action takes place in the library of Mr. Justice Holmes. Act I. Scene 1. An afternoon in December, 1902. Scene 2. An afternoon in March, 1903. Act II. Scene 1. An evening in March, 1911. Scene 2. An afternoon in June, 1916. Scene 3. An evening in March, 1921. Act III. Scene 1. An afternoon in January, 1929. Scene 2. The afternoon of March 4, 1933.*

Director: *Arthur Hopkins.*

IT IS A PARADOX that the theatrical advantage enjoyed by any biographical play which covers a span of years often works to its dramatic disadvantage. The rapt childish attention which an audience invariably visits upon the actors' successive changes in makeup robs much of the drama itself of its adult share, and the evening becomes less a matter of stage engrossment than of dressing-room. In the case of this picture of three decades in the life of Oliver Wendell Holmes it does not, however, materially matter, since the author has provided no drama from which the attention may be diverted. What he has provided is rather merely the spectacle of two figures, Holmes and his wife, in a series of repetitious snapshots of loving family life intermittently

interrupted by calls upon the couple by actors made up as Henry Adams, Owen Wister, and Louis Brandeis. The stage is without trace of conflict, without suspicion of action of any kind. From it, indeed, emerges little more than a shaved-down and static version of the plot of a gently understanding wife's influence upon her husband, familiar from dozens of plays both before and since Barrie's *What Every Woman Knows*. What further emerges is an Oliver Wendell Holmes with none of the mind, wit, force, and quality associated with the man.

The play deals with Holmes from his arrival in Washington, at the age of sixty-one, to join the Supreme Court to his retirement from the high bench thirty-one years later at the age of ninety-two, and covers the period from the Presidency of Theodore Roosevelt to that of Franklin Delano. But so far as any real picture of the man and his mental processes goes, it might as well deal with an invented and fictitious character. Now and then there is vague mention of the difficulties attending the Brandeis appointment and of the Abrams and Rosika Schwimmer cases, yet there is a lugged-in air to them and the whole has the flavor of a poor paraphrase of *Life With Father* attemptedly lent some importance by the periodic introduction of gleanings from Francis Biddle's biography, *Mr. Justice Holmes*, and Catherine Bowen's *Yankee From Olympus*. The bringing on the stage of Adams, Wister, and Brandeis is further remindful of nothing so much as the interpolation of General Grant or Abraham Lincoln into the old tin-pot Civil War melodramas in order to give them a moment or two of bogus size.

There is in addition little to be said for the author's dignity in his recourse to such box-office artifices as the Jewish hokum in connection with Brandeis, the jokes about Harvard, the easy humanizing, as the word goes, of Holmes in such terms, however authentic, as his eye for pretty women, his use of cuss words, and his willingness to have a drink now and then, and the final curtain with President Roosevelt in the wings and about to make his entrance. I had thought that the theatre was done with that trick after all

these years: the character standing alone on the stage, about to be honored in old age by some illustrious head of an empire or state; the ringing announcement that the latter is about to be ushered in; the prolonged hush; and the slow descent of the curtain before the eminento's physical advent. I had thought, to repeat, that the device had some time since been given over to the films, where I am told that it still flourishes as something remarkably original.

In the roles of Holmes and his wife, Louis Calhern and Dorothy Gish offered performances expert in makeup and very impressive to audiences who are given to regard any delineation of old age by actors of lesser years as a very difficult and triumphant histrionic achievement. Calhern's Holmes, enthusiastically praised by many of the critics as a master example of the acting art, amounted intrinsically to little more than a gradual paling of hair and mustache, lining of the face with a makeup pencil, and drooping of the shoulders and corpus. Of inner change there was no symptom; advancing age was registered entirely by the extrinsic means of wigs, powder, and paint, as with innumerable old-time road Rip Van Winkles. Miss Gish's changes were similarly wrought; growth and decline were confined to the surface person.

"Every old actor," wrote Shaw in his memorable review of Irving's performance in *A Story Of Waterloo*, "will understand perfectly how the whole thing is done, and will wish that he could get such press notices for a little hobbling and piping and a few bits of mechanical business. . . . The whole performance does not involve one gesture, one line, one thought outside the commonest routine of automatic stage illusion. What, I wonder, must Mr. Irving, who of course knows this better than any one else, feel when he finds this pitiful little handful of hackneyed stage tricks received exactly as if it were a crowning instance of his most difficult and finest art? No doubt he expected and intended that the public, on being touched and pleased by machinery, should imagine that they were being touched and pleased by acting. But the critics! What can he think of the analytic powers of those of us who, when an organ-

ized and successful attack is made on our emotions, are unable to discriminate between the execution done by the actor's art and that done by Mr. Conan Doyle's ingenious exploitation of the ready-made pathos of old age?"

Mr. Hopkins' direction failed to minimize the artificiality of the enterprise, and Woodman Thompson's library setting, with its walls covered with obviously dummy tomes, accentuated it doubly.



## O MISTRESS MINE. JANUARY 23, 1946

*A comedy, originally known as Love In Idleness, by Terence Rattigan. Produced by the Theatre Guild and John C. Wilson for a rest of the season's run in the Empire Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

OLIVIA BROWN	<i>Lynn Fontanne</i>	MICHAEL BROWN	<i>Dick Van Patten</i>
POLTON	<i>Margery Maude</i>	DIANA FLETCHER	<i>Ann Lee</i>
MISS DELL	<i>Esther Mitchell</i>	MISS WENTWORTH	<i>Marie Paxton</i>
SIR JOHN FLETCHER	<i>Alfred Lunt</i>		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. A house in Westminster — London, 1944. Act II. The same, four days later. Act III. A flat in Baron's Court, three months later.

Director: *Alfred Lunt.*

THE COMEDY, which is minus invention and wit and plainly manufactured as a vehicle for two popular stars, treats of a British war-time Cabinet Minister who, unable to divorce his wife because of the effect it might have on his public position, is living in feathered sin with a widow lady. The latter's young son presently intrudes upon the ménage, waxes indignant over the conditions obtaining therein, and demands that his mother choose between him and her paramour. She agrees to leave the latter, to give up the luxuries with which he has provided her, and to take up life with the boy in a simple flat. The Cabinet Minister subsequently tracks them to their moral lair and announces that he will divorce his wife come what may and make his inamorata an honest woman. The curtain descends as the son accompanies them, all laughing gaily, to dinner at the Savoy. All this is related to the accompaniment of the prescriptive ear-kissing business on the sofa, the frequent changes from one Molyneux gown into another on the part of the heroine, the customary scene in which the two women face each other, the one in the simple flat showing the heroine in the humble act of washing dishes, the callow philosophies sternly projected by the young son, and so on.

The Lunts are a charming couple who apparently agree with Anita Loos' definition of ambition as the cheapest and most contemptible of human attributes. They seem to be perfectly content to remain what they are, to avoid any bourgeois effort to improve their acting status, and to go on doing the easy thing and raking in the easy money. Unlike many of their colleagues, they do not elect to exert themselves in hard work, hard study and difficult roles in the hope of figuring someday among the acting great. Their public likes them as they are, so why bother?

That there is something to be said for their attitude will be obvious to many people, if to few critics. The latter, who are always busybodies in the minds of the aforesaid majority, will regret that two such highly talented players do not see fit to make something more of themselves, to attempt, as they once and long ago did, plays of importance which would offer their abilities bright challenge and the chance for artistic progress, and to develop themselves into something more significant than mere box-office pets. The few critics, in short, have the pride for the Lunts that the Lunts lack. This latest vehicle of theirs is wholly negligible; it presents a job to them that they can manage with both hands tied behind their backs; and it leaves them just where they were a dozen and more years ago. That is to say, it leaves them still exceptionally agreeable parlor performers whom their fans adore; it brings in to them the usual lot of money without any professional worry; and it does not advance either them or the art of the theatre and drama one inch. They remain, as noted, delightful, and applauded, and rich — and, while it may seem gratuitous, I feel a little sorry for them. Which, of course, must amuse them no end, since the thousands of people who are accustomed to visit the brilliance of names on a theatre marquee upon a play with no trace of it and to confuse consistent financial success with acting growth will, like them, dismiss any such critical condescension as objectionable and quite absurd.

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## THE READERS THEATRE. JANUARY 27, 1946

*A recital of Calderón's The Mayor of Zalamea in the English version by Edward Fitzgerald. Produced by the Readers Theatre, Inc., for 2 performances in the Majestic Theatre.*

### CAST

Eugene O'Neill, Jr., Herbert Berghof, Ellen Andrews, Philip Gordon, Jack Manning, Frederic Downs, Amelia Romano, Gregory Morton, Will Davis, Marriott Wilson, Philip Robinson, Robert Gardet, and Leonard Cimino.

Director: *James Light.*

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THE IDEA of the Readers Theatre still sounds good on paper, like a dollar table d'hôte dinner or the United Nations. That idea, in the words of its sponsors, "is to take the great dramatic classics off the shelf, cast them with professional players of the first rank under skilled direction to bring out the hidden magic of the spoken word, and present them without the physical accessories and services which account for the larger share of the costs of regular production." But like such other things which sound good on paper, it does not quite come out that way.

It does not come out for a number of reasons. The Readers Theatre, at least in its first two offerings, the herein-before noted Sophocles' *Œdipus Rex* and this Calderón's *The Mayor Of Zalamea*, has done anything but cast them with professional players of the first rank. It has further done nothing perceptible in the way of skilled direction. And so far as the hidden magic of the spoken word goes, it remains hidden. All that it has done as promised is to have presented the plays "without the physical accessories and services which account for the larger share of the costs of regular production," which, it is to be suspected, are rather necessary to them.

What the Readers Theatre has accomplished, in short, is little more, to repeat, than the old Women's Club, Chau-

tauqua and lyceum solo sort of thing multiplied by eight or ten. That sort of thing once flooded the land and was responsible for some pretty corrosive evenings. Innumerable females, most of them of ancient vintage, who conceived themselves to be artistes of considerable lustre, hired halls right and left, donned homemade flowing Portia robes, imperially mounted the rostrums and let go with their interpretations of the dramatic classics, to the delight of elderly deaf ladies and the agony of their male folk whom they insisted upon bringing along. There was a time in recorded history, indeed, when at least three hundred head of the sighers and bellowers had at the populace annually and so discouraged it from future commerce with the classics that any road theatres which ventured to exhibit them would have gone into bankruptcy had there not subsequently been available bookings of *My Friend From India* and *Jumping Jupiter*.

I well recall one of the girls who once bearded Mencken and me in our magazine editorial chambers. She had, she informed us, been a tremendous success in the tank towns with her readings of Shakespeare and Marlowe and now besought our scholarly advice on what to follow them with. She was, oddly enough, a toothsome item, a fact somewhat less oddly not entirely lost upon us, and in our pursuit of the arts we loaded her up with enough drinks to reduce her to our classic way of thinking. It wasn't long, accordingly, before, among other things, we had persuaded the poor creature that what she should assault the bourgeoisie with were readings not from the ancient boys beloved of the professors but from such modern dramatic illuminati as Paul Armstrong, Channing Pollock, and Frederic Arnold Kummer. In less than six months' time, our bemused friend, duly following our whimsical counsel, had gone out into the sticks and cleaned up enough to retire for three years.

There is thus, as may be seen, no accounting for tastes. The Readers Theatre, verily, has been received in divers quarters with startling acclaim. Harrison Smith, publisher of the *Saturday Review of Literature*, for example, has an-

nounced that "the bare stage, the actors with scripts in their hands, dressed in the clothes in which they came off the street, actually distracted the listener less than the painted palaces and the assortment of togas of conventional performances." The actress, Miss Fania Marinoff, has supplemented Mr. Smith's enthusiasm with "I was completely thrilled; I *saw* the play, I didn't merely *hear* it; it had all the force, the power, the illusion, the terror of a full-fledged production." And there have been and are others. I am, I fear, however not one of them. I have, I think, an imagination as puissant as the next man's. I do not need tons of scenery and costumes to massage my fancy into action. But I can get a whole lot more of the classics' word magic from a library chair reading than from a bleak platform peopled by a number of men in Broadway business suits and women in dowdy street dress all carrying scripts and giving out with unorchestrated elocution and periodic high-school gestures. I can also, I confess, get a deal more out of Mielziner, Jones and Chaney scenery, even when it is not all that it should be, than out of a narrator with whiskers describing what isn't there. And I can get still more out of scene transitions under my own reading lamp in my own lounging room than out of any half dozen such expositors interposing themselves between the book and me. It is not, furthermore, that I am so deficient in imagination that I have to be shown a sceptre, a sword, or a filet mignon à la Robespierre in order to visualize one. But when such a stage property is called for, I must say that I would rather be shown it than be asked vividly to picture it in a reader's gesture which suggests to me much less a sceptre, a sword, or a filet mignon than a grab in the air for an overly assiduous fly.

Theoretically, it isn't to be denied that there is something in the Readers Theatre idea. It is, of course, quite possible that the reading of the classics by expert actors expertly directed might be productive of satisfactory results. Bare stages and absence of properties have further on occasion been employed to sufficiently good effect. But unless any such enterprise is conducted at top levels it must inevitably fail. It is not enough that it do pretty well. It

must at the very least equal in impressiveness and effect the stage as it is more conventionally conducted. The voices of the readers must have the drive and eloquence of actors in the full-fledged medium. The pantomime must under the limited circumstances be superior. The power of suggestion must be even more greatly superior. With the pictorial attributes of the stage lacking, with suggestive scenery (even drapes) and lighting and music in abeyance, the challenge of illusion becomes bitter. Unless that challenge is met, what results is theatrical and dramatic bastardy.

I am in favor of all experiment. It is a valuable thing for the theatre. But too much of this later local experiment, while well considered, is ill wrought. Experiment to succeed must have at least some of the equipment and talent of the commercial theatre. Too often, as we get it in these days, it hasn't. Even lovely dreams, alas, must be resolved into fairly pragmatic terms. Unresolved, Calderón's seventeenth century drama of rivalry between military and civil authority, of crime and justice, becomes in the hands of the Readers Theatre simply a sound track with no picture.

## BORN YESTERDAY. FEBRUARY 4, 1946

*A comedy by Garson Kanin. Produced by Max Gordon for a rest of the season's run in the Lyceum Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

HELEN	<i>Ellen Hall</i>	ED DEVERY	<i>Otto Hulett</i>
PAUL VERRALL	<i>Gary Merrill</i>	BARBER	<i>Ted Mayer</i>
EDDIE BROCK	<i>Frank Otto</i>	MANICURIST	<i>Mary Laslo</i>
BELLHOP	<i>William Harmon</i>	BOOTBLACK	<i>Paris Morgan</i>
BELLHOP	<i>Rex King</i>	SENATOR NORVAL HEDGES	
HARRY BROCK	<i>Paul Douglas</i>		<i>Larry Oliver</i>
THE ASSISTANT MANAGER		MRS. HEDGES	<i>Mona Bruns</i>
	<i>Carroll Ashburn</i>	WAITER	<i>C. L. Burke</i>
BILLIE DAWN	<i>Judy Holliday</i>		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. *September, 1945.* Act II. *Two months later.*  
Act III. *Late that night.*

Scene. *Washington, D. C.*

Director: *Garson Kanin.*

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THE CHIEF INDUSTRY of Hollywood, topping even divorce, million dollar lawsuits, social fisticuffs, fortune tellers, and hamburgers with lichee nuts, is widely rumored to be sex. It is therefore only natural that Mr. Kanin, who is no stranger to the place, should, like most other members of that cultural parish who have their eyes on the theatre, export a considerable cargo of it in his play. It is the further penchant of the members when they come East to intimate that their mentalities are far above the movie level, that they are superiorly interested in the affairs of the great outside world, and that, so far as they are cerebrally concerned, Darryl Zanuck, Lana Turner and all the rest can go right back to where they came from. In proof whereof they mix the sex in their plays with their private philosophies on Democracy, Fascism, economics, politics, sociology, and other such lofty subjects. They also like to have us know that they are unexpectedly and surprisingly educated, and to this end are usually in the habit of introducing into their plays little

cullings from literature, music, and the other arts. Mr. Kanin accordingly and canonically sprinkles his sex and politics with quotations from such remarkable literary giants as Robert G. Ingersoll, phonograph recordings of Sibelius, tidbits of Thomas Paine, and the Information Please sort. But Mr. Kanin, unlike many of his Hollywood brothers, is a man of some relieving wit and humor and his *mélange*, which suggests Shaw's *Pygmalion* rewritten by the Loos of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* in eccentric collaboration with the Pinero of *Iris*, becomes the stuff of a somewhat labored but ribaldly amusing comedy.

Shaw's flower-girl Galatea in this instance is an ignorant, baby-faced, blonde chorus girl; his Professor Higgins a Washington journalist whom the girl's Maldonado, an illiterate captain of the junk industry who corrupts Senators to his own financial ends, hires to instruct her in the ways of ladies. The plot deals with the education of the little ignoramus to the danger point and with her final undoing of her crooked protector. When the story hews to its direct line, the result is not particularly fertile. But when the playwright sends it skidding up and down side-alleys and chuckles at it, which he often does contagiously, the stage becomes merry. Even while criticism penetrates the doings for what essentially they are not worth, the bladder and slapstick bacilli which lurk rebelliously in the corpus of the most august criticism get in their pleasant dirty work.

The role of the dumb chorus girl was originally occupied by Jean Arthur of the films. For one reason or another — rumor credits it to various things — she withdrew while the play was in its road tryout period. Whatever the reason, it was fortunate for the producer that Judy Holliday eventually found herself in the part. Miss Arthur's personality and straight and relatively orthodox dramatic portrayal of the role, irrespective of its merit, would have bruised it of its present exactly right wayward and imbecile humor, and the play, unless I am very much mistaken, would have taken on a quite different and destructive color. The rest of the company, particularly Paul Douglas as the Fascist-minded junk king and Gary Merrill as the Professor Higgins, is tip-



top. Within a setting by Donald Oenslager picturing with appropriate hideousness a two hundred and thirty-five dollar a day Washington hotel suite, the author has directed his play with a sure commercial eye, save perhaps in the last act, which at one point seriously deteriorates in interest for an audience which childishly expects the journalist to be caught in the act of stealing the racketeer's incriminating papers and is disappointed when the racketeer's momentarily anticipated entrance does not materialize.

Nevertheless, and in brief, an often gay, lively, and bawdy show, whatever the faults criticism may correctly find in it.

## JANUARY THAW. FEBRUARY 4, 1946

*A dramatization by William Roos of Bellamy Partridge's novel of the same name. Produced by Michael Todd for 48 performances in the Golden Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

SARAH GAGE	Lorna Lynn	MATHILDA ROCKWOOD	
FRIEDA	Norma Lehn		Helen Carew
PAUL GAGE	Charles Nevil	MR. LOOMIS	John McGovern
HERBERT GAGE	Robert Keith	UNCLE WALTER	Charles Burrows
MARGE GAGE	Lulu Mae Hubbard	MATT ROCKWOOD	Irving Morrow
BARBARA GAGE	Natalie Thompson	CARSON	Henry Jones
GEORGE HUSTED	John Hudson	MELVIN CORLEY	Paul Weiss
JONATHAN ROCKWOOD			
	Charles Middleton		

**SYNOPSIS:** *The living-room of an old house in Connecticut. The Gage family, after restoring it to its colonial state, have just moved in.*  
 Act I. Scene 1. *A morning in June.* Scene 2. *Evening of the same day.*  
 Act II. Scene 1. *Next September (early morning).* Scene 2. *The following January (late afternoon).* Act III. *Early next morning.*

Director: *Ezra Stone.*

IF ONE of the run-of-the-mill producers had put on the play, surprise would not have been perceptible. It is that kind of doomed show goods. To find as its sponsor one who is vain of his virtuosity in showmanship is, however, at least a little puzzling. Mr. Todd is such a one. Showmanship is his pride and boast, and not always unwarrantably. But showmen, even the best of them, seem sometimes to lose their balance when they try to occupy the two stools of Barnum and Frohman. Just as that superior showman, Billy Rose, whose Aquacades and Diamond Horseshoes and Fairs and musical exhibits are most often successful in pleasing the popular trade, has tumbled to the floor when he has ventured to sit upon the chair of drama, as in the instances of *The Great Magoo* and *Clash By Night*, so Todd, whose musicals and *GI Hamlets* and suchlike ventures have tickled that trade, and similarly with considerable warrant, has

tumbled when he in turn has hoped to sit on it with things like *The Man From Cairo*, *Call Me Ziggy*, *The Naked Genius*, and this play. Perhaps the Barnums were wiser to stick to their elephants.

The present Todd error is a comedy that suggests a vulgarized paraphrase of *George Washington Slept Here*. A city family takes a house in rural Connecticut and finds that the yokel owners have a clause in the bill of sale which permits them to continue to live in it. The difficulties that usually afflict life in the country set in and the city folk, who originally resented the intrusion of the yokels, are finally only too happy to welcome their knowing aid in the various bucolic crises. The comedy consists in allusions to pregnancy, privies, chamber pots, and manure, along with rusty quips about Calvin Coolidge and Gabriel Heatter. The flavor of the dialogue may be savoured from such alumni lines as the city wife's indignant "You haven't heard a word I said!", and as her author husband's sardonic "Now I can quit writing and go back to work." The desired Todd sex note is struck when the son of the yokel couple is thought to have visited worse than death upon the daughter of the city couple. The stage direction by Ezra Stone was of the species that has the actors promptly turn and face the audience when anyone addresses them. And the acting was of the kind that should have made them ashamed to do any such thing.

## APPLE OF HIS EYE. FEBRUARY 5, 1946

*A comedy by Kenyon Nicholson and Charles Robinson. Produced by Jed Harris in association with Walter Huston for 118 performances in the Biltmore Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

STELLA SPRINGER	<i>Doro Merande</i>	CAROL ANN STOVER	
FOSS SPRINGER	<i>Arthur Hunnicutt</i>		<i>Jimsey Somers</i>
LILY TOBIN	<i>Mary James</i>	OTT TOBIN	<i>Joseph Sweeney</i>
TUDE BOWERS	<i>Roy Fant</i>	NETTIE BOWERS	<i>Claire Woodbury</i>
SAM STOVER	<i>Walter Huston</i>	GLEN STOVER	<i>Tom Ewell</i>

SYNOPSIS: *The action of the play takes place several years ago at Sam Stover's Maple Lawn Farm, Highland Township, Montgomery County, Indiana. Act I. Scene 1. A Saturday afternoon in October. Scene 2. Afternoon, several days later. Act II. Scene 1. The following morning. Scene 2. That night.*

Director: *Jed Harris.*

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IT IS THE DREAM of many an older actor to get hold of the role of a venerable character that will be identified with him over the years and serve him as a steady vehicle. It is also his dream that the role be of a homely, homespun, rustic nature, since the records indicate that it may thus be doubly popular with the family trade. There was Joe Jefferson in *Rip Van Winkle*, wasn't there? And Denman Thompson in *The Old Homestead*? And James A. Herne in *Shore Acres*? And Frank Bacon in *Tennessee's Pardner*, which was subsequently metamorphosed into *Lightnin'*? And various such others, all immensely successful? Walter Huston has accordingly got himself an old Indiana farmer replete with spectacles, overalls, galluses, and eventual store clothes. Unfortunately, however, he has not got the old farmer either a role or a play. The role is a vacuum which gives him none of the affectionate contact that any such role must give if it is to be a popular one. And the play containing it is less a play than an extended commentary by its other characters on the role that isn't there.

It seems that every time we turn our backs some playwright takes advantage of us with the exhibit about the man past middle age who falls in love with a young girl, or vice versa. My own back, I figure, has now been turned at least forty or fifty times since and even before my professional interest in the theatre began. Once in a while, as in Barrie's early *The Professor's Love Story*, Gillette's later *Clarice* or van Druten's recent *The Mermaids Singing*, some agreeable entertainment may result. But in most cases the story has become so yellowed with the years and so obvious in treatment that one knows every turn of it twenty minutes after the curtain has lifted. In *Apple Of His Eye*, one knows it five minutes sooner.

The authors, moreover, have done nothing to alleviate the awareness. Though they lay their play specifically in Highland Township, Montgomery County, Indiana, the locale, considering the nature of their characters, might be that of almost any rural play seen in the theatre in the last sixty years. These characters are all cut from the time-honored and molded pattern: the gossiping female neighbor, the old female housekeeper with the miseries, the pretty young country girl with the ribbon in her hair, her swindler father, the son and daughter-in-law who are one day to inherit the farm and who fear that it may fall meanwhile into other hands, their small girl-child with pigtailed who makes up to the old farmer, the old handyman, and so on. The comedy consists in the stock allusions to operations, gall-stones, party line telephones, hair dyes, and hot water bags. The dialogue may be recognized from a single specimen spoken by the old farmer: "The way everybody tries to run me you'd think I wasn't dry behind the ears, and I'm not going to stand for it; if I want to cut didoes in public, by Christmas, I'll cut 'em!" And the final curtain descends upon the business that we must have heard at least ten times before, to wit, the young girl's protest that the wedding ring which the old farmer has given her is too big for her and his reply, "You'll grow into it."

In an interview before the opening, Mr. Huston said, "It's an unsophisticated little play. 'By Harry' and 'By

Christmas' are the roughest expressions used in it. I like it because of the people in it — there's nothing mean or ugly about them; they're nice, simple, kind country people." Mr. Huston, who rejected roles in both the successful *Show Boat* and *The Magnificent Yankee* to do the play, which is a dribbler, is thus very evidently confused in all directions. How he reconciles as nice, simple, kind country people with nothing mean or ugly about them a lot of characters like the nagging country-jake husband, the vicious-tongued female neighbor, the grasping daughter-in-law, the young girl's blackmailing father, and the envious and mean-spirited elderly housekeeper is hardly clear. But even were he right, his judgment as to the chance of success of any such play would be on the error side. The day of plays of a kind seems, at least for the time being, to be done. The simple, homely, rustic play of other years appears from all the evidence to have given way to the mean rusticity of *Tobacco Road* and the dirty rusticity of road shows like *Maid In The Ozarks*. Huston winding the clock in this *Apple Of His Eye* takes us back to Herne doing the same thing in *Shore Acres*, and leaves us there.

The direction by Jed Harris and the acting took us back to an even earlier period, and Raymond Sovey's farmhouse room setting with an unpainted and badly creased canvas flat observable through one of the windows took us back to a period earlier still.

## LUTE SONG. FEBRUARY 6, 1946

*An adaptation of the more than 500-year-old Chinese play, Pi-Pa-Chi, by Sidney Howard and Will Irwin, with music by Raymond Scott, lyrics by Bernard Hanighen. Produced by Michael Myerberg for the season's run in the Plymouth Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

FIRST CLERK	Max Leavitt	TSAI-YONG,	} Yul Brynner
SECOND CLERK	Bob Turner	THE HUSBAND	
FIRST APPLICANT	Tom Emelyn Williams	FIRST PROPERTY MAN	Albert Vecchio
SECOND APPLICANT	Michael Blair	SECOND PROPERTY MAN	Leslie Rheinfeld
IMPERIAL GUARDS	{ John Robert Lloyd John High	TSAI, THE FATHER	Augustin Duncan
IMPERIAL ATTENDANTS	{ Gordon Showalter Ronald Fletcher	MADAME TSAI, THE MOTHER	Mildred Dunnoek
THE GENIE	Ralph Clanton	TCHAO-OU-NIANG, THE WIFE	Mary Martin
THE WHITE TIGER	Lisa Maslova	PRINCE NIEOU, THE IMPERIAL PERCEPTOR	McKay Morris
THE APE	Lisan Kay	PRINCESS NIEOU-CHI, HIS DAUGHTER	Helen Craig
PHOENIX BIRDS	{ Lisa Maslova Lisan Kay	SI-TCHUN, A LADY IN WAITING	Nancy Davis
LI-WANG	Max Leavitt	WAITING WOMEN	{ Pamela Wilde Sydelle Sylovna
PRIEST OF AMIDA BUDDHA	Tom Emelyn Williams	HAND MAIDENS	{ Blanche Zohar Mary Ann Reeve
A BONZE	Gene Galvin	YOUEN-KONG, THE STEWARD	Rex O'Malley
TWO LESSER BONZES	{ Joseph Camiolo Leslie Rheinfeld	A MARRIAGE BROKER	Diane De Brett
A RICH MAN	Bob Turner	A MESSENGER	Jack Amoroso
A MERCHANT	John High	THE IMPERIAL CHAMBERLAIN	Ralph Clanton
A LITTLE BOY	Donald Rose	THE FOOD COMMISSIONER	Gene Galvin
THE LION	{ Walter Stane Alberto Vecchio		
CHILDREN	{ Mary Ann Reeve Blanche Zohar		
A SECRETARY	Teddy Rose		
THE MANAGER	Michael Blair		
THE HONORABLE TSCHANG	Clarence Derwen		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. The house of Tsai in the village of Tchih-lieou. Scene 2. The north road leading to the capital. Scene 3. Gardens of the palace of Prince Nieou. Scene 4. The house of Tsai in the

village of Tchín-lieou. Scene 5. The gate to the Palace of the Voice of Jade. Act II. Scene 1. Gardens of the palace of Prince Nieou. Scene 2. A public granary in the village of Tchín-lieou. Scene 3. Gardens of the palace of Prince Nieou. Scene 4. The house of Tsai in the village of Tchín-lieou. Scene 5. Market place—Street of the Hair Buyers. Scene 6. A burial place in the village of Tchín-lieou. Act III. In the gardens of the palace of Prince Nieou. Scene 2. The north road leading to the capital. Scene 3. In the palace. Scene 4. The Temple of Amidha Buddha. Scene 5. A street in the capital. Scene 6. The Blue Pavilion in the palace of Prince Nieou.

Director: John Houseman.

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IT IS APPARENT from their reviews of the play that most of the New York critics would prefer the Chinese drama to have been written by Garson Kanin. Judging from their dicta, they not alone condemn *Lute Song* but that drama in its entirety. Which of course is their privilege, if not precisely a tribute to their æsthetic flexibility and dramatic education. If they must swallow the Chinese drama in any form, they seem to favor it in such Shaftsbury Avenue or Broadway caricatures as *Chu Chin Chow*, *The Yellow Jacket*, and *Lady Precious Stream*, or, perhaps better still, in the shape of something like Hoyt's *A Trip To Chinatown*.

Their antipathy is, however, not altogether unintelligible. Like most other Americans, they crave speed and action above all else and, since the Chinese drama is lacking in those attributes, it fails to gratify them. They further are not to be won by the sentiment in that drama; it is much too delicate for their taste. They prefer not, to be sure, sentimentality, but sentiment less suggestive of the lotus flower and more solidly identified with that of *Life With Father* and *I Remember Mama*. They prefer, in other words, Papa's "Look, Katrin; you wanted the present; Mama wanted your happiness; she wanted it more than she wanted the brooch" and little Katrin's tearful "But I never meant her to do *that*; she *loved* it so; it was all she had of Grandmother's" to the softly singing words of the lutes and the willows. And it is thus, and naturally, that the gentle languor and gentle flow and gentle sentiment of any such play



as this, whether Chinese or Irish or American, is alien to their acceptance and that a *Lute Song*, like a *Within The Gates* or a *My Heart's In The Highlands*, must fail with them.

This is not to say that this particular Chinese classic is a work of perfection. It is very far from being that in either its original or adapted form. But it is at least charming and affecting and, for all its undeniable intermittent lags and lapses, something like the sound of a mandolin in the prevailing dramatic din of trombones. Nothing is perfect in the drama; even the greatest play ever written, *Hamlet*, grantedly jars perfection at several points. But for some inscrutable reason our critics sternly look for and demand the ultimate or nothing in the drama of any land and any peoples remote and completely strange to them. They have, their writings show, once again looked for and demanded it here. It is not here, and consequently they have abruptly dismissed not only the play as a whole but some of the very elements in it which they heartily endorse in equivalent in the Occidental drama.

In an essay on the play by its co-adaptor, Mr. Irwin, we read that "*Pi-Pa-Ki (The Story Of A Lute)* was written in its original form by Kao-Tong-Kia." Mr. Irwin is in error. The play is not *Pi-Pa-Ki* but *Pi-Pa-Chi*, and the original author was not Kao-Tong-Kia but Kao-Tsi-ch'ing. In the original, the play, which is in the later Ming dynasty as opposed to the Yuan form, emphasizes filial devotion and piety, a theme favorite of Chinese drama. In its adapted form, it emphasizes marital fidelity, with the filial piety theme somewhat shadowed. This, it seems to me, is not only thoroughly legitimate, since that theme, too, inheres in the original, but even an improvement, at least in the case of the Western stage. The filial piety idea in the original is overly extended in treatment; the speeches concerning it overly long. The counterpoint story of the young husband who travels afar to seek fame and whose love for the young wife he has left behind endures above everything including a forced court second marriage is the stronger dramatic thread, and the adaptors have in the main done well with

it. They have, if anything, retained just a bit too much of the filial theme; at times it intrudes and again overemphasizes itself.

Among the peculiar local critical objections to the play we observe that "it is altogether too languid; nothing happens in it." If love, marriage, bigamy, pilgrimage, soul torture, starvation, violent death, and divers other such joys and catastrophes do not constitute something happening, Strindberg's *The Dance Of Death*, for one example, must have been written by a Chinaman. Another and not less peculiar criticism is that the local pageantry and elaborate costuming of the play are out of key with its simplicity. Pageantry and elaborate costuming have surely not been unknown in the Chinese theatre in the instances of plays equally simple, and have not violated their simplicity.

More and more it becomes clear that plays of delicate charm are distasteful to the bulk of local criticism and that the producer who courageously takes a chance with them is destined often to suffer a heavy loss. The majority of the critics, as in the case of this play, whose dramatic beauty, if not stage embellishment, was allowed to go for nothing, have turned thumbs down on any number of plays which similarly have sought the lace and silk and music in themes more generally maneuvered in terms of rough tweed. Or, if not precisely thumbs down, have visited upon them that kind of condescension which usually takes its rueful levy of the box-office. Quality or little, the more delicate drama thus finds itself challenged before even its curtain lifts. We discover, accordingly, that in the last ten years such deserving plays of the species as *Noah*, *The Beautiful People*, *Magic*, *My Heart's In The Highlands*, *A Highland Fling* and the like have suffered as much, if indeed not more, than such less deserving as *Heavenly Express*, *The Innocent Voyage*, *How Beautiful With Shoes*, and *Solitaire*. A charming *Love's Old Sweet Song* has fared no better than a poor *Mr. Sycamore*, and all, failing Michael Todd's "meat and potatoes" definition of popularity, have failed in turn with the critics and, consequently, a sheeplike public.

It is a strange commentary on our theatre and its respon-

sible critical guides that a play like *Noah* achieves only forty-five performances as against a *Kiss And Tell's* nine hundred and forty-eight, that one like *My Heart's In The Highlands* upon its initial presentation only fourteen as against a *Junior Miss'* seven hundred and ten, and a *A Highland Fling* but twenty-eight as against a *Janie's* six hundred and forty-two. Open to some skepticism, surely, is a critic-led stage that provides only forty performances for something like *The Innocent Voyage* and all of 1,295 for something like *Angel Street*, only a forced and cut-rate sixty-four for a *The Beautiful People* against a rich eight hundred and thirty-five for *Three Men On A Horse*, and but twenty-three for something like *Letters To Lucerne*, forty-seven for *Magic* and thirty-two for *Aged Twenty-Six* as against eight hundred and sixty-five for *My Sister Eileen*, six hundred and seventy-one for *The Doughgirls* and six hundred and sixty-nine for *Boy Meets Girl*. Open to some skepticism, that is, on the part of those who, while admittedly relishing a number of these praised and prosperous plays, yet long at times for a stage that might be critically blessed with plays which at least aim at something just a little finer, a little more fanciful, and just a little more greatly sparked by imagination.

Our professional theatre has lost much by this dramatic delicacyphobia. It has lost the enjoyment to be found in many of the plays of Synge and Yeats, of Sierra and the Quinteros, of Capus and Giacosa and Schnitzler and various such others. What it has meanwhile gained from those of our pushcart merchants of realism I leave to some different brand of critical statistician.

Perhaps I am not altogether fair to those who in these later years have been the public's mentors. The distaste for plays of delicacy is no new thing in American critical circles; it dates pretty far back. It has taken its pound of flesh from countless plays, many of them of merit. It has dismissed such as Hauptmann's *The Sunken Bell* and Barrie's *The Legend Of Leonora*, Browning's *Pippa Passes* and Schnitzler's *Light o' Love*, Rostand's *The Far-away Princess* and his *The Last Night Of Don Juan*. It has sent to limbo

many like Locke's *The Morals Of Marcus*, Strong's *The Toy Maker of Nuremberg*, Gillette's *Clarice*, and Marks' *The Piper*. It has declined Jones' *Michael And His Lost Angel* in favor of his *Mrs. Dane's Defence* and Maeterlinck's *Sister Beatrice* in favor of his *Monna Vanna*. It has condemned Zoë Akins' *Papa* and welcomed her *Declassé*, has walloped George M. Cohan's *Pigeons And People* and smiled upon his *Hit-the-Trail Halliday*, has spurned Harrison Rhodes' *The Willow Tree* and endorsed his *The Gentleman From Mississippi*. It has had little use for Guitry's *Mozart*, Bernard's *Invitation To A Voyage*, Dorrance Davis' *A Lady In Love*, Anderson's and Stallings' *First Flight*, and dozens of others such.

But what once was, nonetheless still is. The plays which continue to achieve the favor of most of the critics are, as in this season, (I use the critics' own designations) the "strong" plays like *Deep Are The Roots*, the "constructive and meaty" plays like *State Of The Union*, the "ingeniously staged three-track" plays like *Dream Girl*, and the "rowdy, bawdy, swift, belly-laugh" plays like *Born Yesterday*. I do not for a moment mean to suggest that one or two of these may not be amusing and available theatre fare. But I dare say our theatre can stand at times something a little different, something a little more elevated, and something baptized in more imagination and beauty. *Lute Song* is such a play.

The costuming and settings in the production are the work of Robert Edmond Jones and are as beautiful as anything we have seen on the stage. The music by Raymond Scott has drollery and here and there some imagination. Several of Bernard Hanighen's lyrics, notably "Mountain High, Valley Low," "Where You Are," and "Monkey See, Monkey Do," are in the spirit of the play's varying moods. And the dramatic direction by John Houseman and the choreographic direction by Yeichi Nimura could scarcely be much improved upon.

The acting, however, is another matter. While Clarence Derwent and McKay Morris are happy in their respective roles, most of the others are considerably less so. Mary Mar-

tin is only in look and figure appropriate to the part of the heroine; she reserves any hint of inner emotion solely for her singing; the dramatic phases of the role elude her and become in her hands mere dry elocution. (This, she should remember, is an emotionalized Chinese play.) As her husband, Yul Brynner indicates small acting competence save that associated with what the profession knows as "mobile features," and indicates not always even that. Augustin Duncan and Mildred Dunnock, as the heroine's father and mother, are less for Chinese drama than for some such American popcorn melodrama as *Chinatown Charlie*. And the rest are at best only passable.

But the mood of the play itself and the color laid over it by admirable stagecraft triumph over such obstacles, and the splendor of delicacy envelops the evening. Michael Myerberg, the producer, who with Eddie Dowling seems to represent the American theatre's imagination and taste and courage, is to be sympathized with for a fine endeavor's cruel critical reception.

# THE DUCHESS MISBEHAVES. FEBRUARY 13, 1946

*A musical comedy with book by Gladys Shelley and Joe Bigelow, lyrics by Miss Shelley, and music by Dr. Frank Black. Produced by A. P. Waxman for 5 calamitous performances and a loss of 230,000 dollars in the Adelphi Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

### (IN CARLTON'S DEPARTMENT STORE)

WOMAN	Grace Hayle	FIRST GIRL	Gail Adams
FRANCHOT	Buddy Ferraro	SECOND GIRL	Ethel Madson
FIRST SISTER	Elena Boyd	MISS KESTER	Paula Laurence
SECOND SISTER	Mildred Boyd	CRYSTAL SHALIMAR	
THIRD SISTER	Edith Boyd		Audrey Christie
BUTTERFLY	Penny Edwards	REPORTER	Al Downing
PAUL	Larry Douglas	NEVILLE GOLDGLITTER	
FITZGERALD	James MacColl		Philip Tonge
WOONSOCKET	Joey Faye		

### (IN SPAIN)

PABLO	Larry Douglas	DUKE OF ALBA	Philip Tonge
AMBER	Grace Hayle	LADIES IN WAITING	
GOYA	Joey Faye		The Boyd Triplets
MODEL	Joanne Jaap	QUEEN OF SPAIN	
ROBERTO	James MacColl		Paula Laurence
DUCHESS OF ALBA	Audrey Christie	A MODEL	Norma Kohane
MARIPOSA	Penny Edwards	MATADOR	George Tapps
BARBER	Paul Marten	JOSÉ	Al Downing
MANICURIST	Joanne Jaap	DANCER	Mata Monteria
TAILOR	Ken Martin	THE WOMAN	Jean Handzlik
ASSISTANT TAILOR	Bernie Williams	HER MAN	George Tapps
MESSANGER	Buddy Ferraro	MAGICIAN	Ken Martin
FIRST STUDENT	Victor Clark	ASSISTANT MAGICIAN	
SECOND STUDENT	Jess Randolph		Buddy Ferraro

Director: Martin Manulis.

THE MISBEHAVIOR is not confined to the duchess. It extends to the authors of the book and lyrics and to the composer. The former should be spanked with scripts of all the many other shows in which the characters are whisked back

to another land and century, and the latter, whose ear for music is chiefly for that in previous shows, should be dealt retributive justice by being compelled first to listen to the melodies of Kern, Porter, *et al.*, and then to the paraphrased horrors he has made of them. And the trio, for good measure, should be forced to sit through their idyll and lend ears to its lyrics with their genteel rhythms of "spouse" and "louse" and to the bulk of its comedy which assumes such shapes as "Oh, Señor, don't go, you bewitch me," with the reply, "Aw, I'll be wit' choo later." Lest the punishment be too easy, they should also have to attend such further humors as "I'm a great bull fighter" — "Well, you certainly can throw the bull"; "That's a beautiful painting; but is it a cow or a fish?"; and "I am an expert artist; I painted the warts on a picture of Dorian Gray." To say nothing of further lyrics having to do with a man who boasts that he is sexually fetched by many women and hence is "broad-minded," and with a woman named Katie who was sexually fetched by a toreador and so Katie did in Madrid.

The inveterate plot concerns the comedian who is again hit over the head and in his hallucination finds himself back in the eighteenth century as the artist Goya. He is vengefully pursued by the husband of the Duchess of Alba, whom he has dared to paint in the nude, and exercises himself to locate another woman with a mole similarly on her thigh who may serve as an alibi. In the end, he is relieved to come to again in the twentieth century. Embroidering the plot are delicate allusions to the concupiscent Goya's plumbing, arty remarks about dallying with Dali, considerable feverish tap dancing, a papier-mâché bull with the comedian's legs as its motive power, the aforesaid comedian, Mr. Joey Faye, whose comedy consists mainly in small sneezes, blonde female triplets of hefty beam who appear at intervals and lift their voices in nothing approximating song, and a refined ditty by the Duchess called "Nuts."

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 ANTIGONE. FEBRUARY 18, 1946

*A paraphrase of the Sophocles tragedy by Jean Anouilh, adapted by Lewis Galantière. Produced by Katharine Cornell in association with Gilbert Miller for 64 performances in the Cort Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

CHORUS	<i>Horace Braham</i>	FIRST GUARD	<i>George Mathews</i>
ANTIGONE	<i>Katharine Cornell</i>	SECOND GUARD	<i>David J. Stewart</i>
NURSE	<i>Bertha Belmore</i>	THIRD GUARD	<i>Michael Higgins</i>
ISMENE	<i>Ruth Matteson</i>	MESSENGER	<i>Oliver Cliff</i>
HAEMON	<i>Wesley Addy</i>	PAGE	<i>Albert Biondo</i>
CREON	<i>Cedric Hardwicke</i>	EURYDICE	<i>Merle Maddern</i>

Director: *Guthrie McClintic.*

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THE GREEKS had no word for it. But the Latins had six. They were *sit ut est aut non sit*. That is, let it be as it is or let it alone.

I am not one of those confirmed mothballs who foam when someone lays hold of one of the classics and gives us another version of it, provided the someone manages a sufficiently imaginative, skilful, and impressive job. There have been various such able jobs in the past, and no one has had a more salubrious time imbibing them than I have had. But this particular one is in large part not among them. I am afraid that I like Sophocles' original job a lot better. I also like the way the Shuberts of Sophocles' day put on the play considerably more than the way Miss Cornell and her associates, following the French lead, have put it on. I do not object to playing certain of the classics in modern or relatively modern dress. On occasion the trick has been pretty effective, as we have seen most recently in the Maurice Evans production of *Hamlet* and as we saw, among others, in the Basil Sydney presentation of the same play and in the Orson Welles *Julius Caesar*. But it can be carried too far, and that is the degree to which it has been carried



in this case. I can think of many ridiculous things, but I can think of none more so than a parcel of actors in classic Greek tragedy dressed in swallow tails, dinner jackets, and Valentina evening gowns. Any genuine sense of tragedy must under any such circumstances be distilled into bootleg Lonsdale drawing-room comedy, with only the butler missing. Far from more easily suggesting modern parallels in the drama, it handicaps both attention and concurrence by imposing upon the rebellious imagination the necessity for fighting its way back over the centuries and visualizing the costumes appropriate to the dramatic business in hand. To be asked to assimilate the thunderous tragedy of Sophocles, in whatever form, if funneled through a cast more relevantly accoutred for *Lord And Lady Algy* is asking, I fear, a bit too much.

Allowing for the fact that Anouilh seems to be a writer of some independent wit and brio and that one or two scenes in his paraphrase, notably the long one between Creon, king of Thebes, and Antigone, his niece who would defy him, are smartly executed, the second fact persists that his version in the aggregate is less Sophocles than sophomore. Over it, for all its several virtues, hovers the air of a college boy's stunt. That the college boy, who has read his Sophocles firmly and intelligently, is much better than most of his species is not to be gainsaid, but the college boy flavor is nonetheless there. And nowhere is it more apparent than in his studiously cacophonous mixture of slang with lyric expression, always a symptom of classroom literary bravado, and in his fear of too even dramatic flow and his consequent hopeful injection into it of something that may be a little startling, as, for example, "Right on the main square she was, histin' up her skirts and showing her behind to anybody who wanted to take a look." Or, in the former instance, Creon's "And you still insist upon being put to death . . . merely because I refused his body the wretched consolation of that mass-production jibber-jabber." Or, in both, the Chorus' final "All those who were meant to die have died; those who believed one thing, those who believed the contrary thing, and even those who believed

nothing and yet were caught up in the web without knowing why. All dead . . . and those who have survived will begin quietly to forget the dead. It is all over. . . . A great melancholy wave of peace now settles down upon Thebes, upon the empty palace. . . . Only the guards are left, and none of this matters to them. It's no skin off their noses."

The evening is marked further by altogether too much condescension. It may be granted that the average audience is slightly behindhand in the matter of the Greek classics, but I doubt if it is so extremely backward that it demands in its program a two-thousand word explanation of what it is going to see and a narrator who subsequently explains what it has seen in a thousand words more.

In general, the exhibit may be summed up as follows. It is one of those experimental enterprises that are customarily described by the critics as "dignified," which often means simply that much money has been unselfishly spent to fruitless ends. It delivers from the mouth of its hypothetical tyrant Creon some wise and telling words that are strangely alien to the play's opposite thematic intent. While pictorial and dulcet of voice as always, Miss Cornell struggles to nowhere with a tragic role that, for all the author's hopeful belief to the contrary, has been hazily couched in terms of the-villain-still-pursued-her gallery melodrama. Cedric Hardwicke, however, in the only ably written role of the evening, is admirable; what there is of the play, he makes his own. The rest, except for George Mathews in the absurdly introduced part of a Hollywood film gangster, are both in script and performance dummies.

Two final points. First, the idea of dressing the actors in old Greek drama in Savile Row and Bond Street evening finery is as rational as would be dressing those of *State Of The Union* in armor and togas. Secondly, dressing them in such wise and causing them for the most part without physical movement to retail their lines on a stage hung with a gray drape lends to the whole hardly much more than the impression of a Readers Theatre performance backed by someone with money in the bank.

## JEB. FEBRUARY 21, 1946

*A play by Robert Ardrey. Produced by Herman Shumlin for 9 performances in the Martin Beck Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

SOLLY	Morris McKenney	LIBE	Rudolph Whitaker
DON	Charles Holland	JEFFERSON	Christopher Bennett
CYNTHIE	Carolyn Hill Stewart	JULIAN	Maurice Ellis
HAZY JOHNSON	Wardell Saunders	PAUL DEVOURS	Santos Ortega
JEB TURNER	Ossie Davis	MRS. DEVOURS	Grace McTarnahan
BUSH	P. Jay Sidney	CHARLES BARD	Frank M. Thomas
FLABBER	Percy Verwayen	DR. HAZELTON	Edwin Cushman
SIMPSON	G. Harry Bolden	MR. GIBNEY	Grover Burgess
MR. TOUHY	W. J. Hackett	JOSEPH	Milton Shirah
AMANDA TURNER	Laura Bowman	MR. DOWD	Edward Forbes
RACHEL	Reri Grist	WHITE MAN	Owen Hewitt
LIBBY GEORGE	Ruby Dee		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *The Elite Café, in the Negro section of a northern city. A spring evening.* Scene 2. *Amanda Turner's kitchen, in a small Louisiana town. Dusk, a few days later.* Scene 3. *The Devours back parlor. An afternoon about two weeks later.* Act II. Scene 1. *The timekeeper's shed at the sugar mill. That night.* Scene 2. *Amanda's kitchen. Later that night.* Scene 3. *Behind Dr. Hazleton's church. The next evening.* Scene 4. *The Elite Café. An evening, some weeks later.*

Director: Herman Shumlin.

**A**RDREY's is another play about the trials of the Negro in our white-dominated land, and with the Negro personified as a returned serviceman. It is a more voltaic one than *Deep Are The Roots*. It is also much more voltaic than either *Strange Fruit* or *A Young American*, whose protagonists are not in uniform. So much for critical commendation, even if purely relative. It is, however, the play's practical handicap that it covers ground already more than sufficiently covered and so loses much in theatrical provocation.

Criticism, of course and as indicated, should overlook any such accidents of fortune and should give a play its in-

dependent, if meritedly but modest, due, which is herewith given this one. But I must nevertheless confess, quite unprofessionally and perhaps lamentably, that I, for one, have now become a little fed up on all these plays and novels and short stories and essays protesting that the white man is a blackguard where the Negro is concerned and that the latter always gets an inordinately dirty deal. That there is much justice in the complaint, I do not for a moment doubt. But I should be equally fed up with a similar succession of exhibits, good or bad, which unrelievedly argued any other single subject under the sun.

It is probably unnecessary to outline the plot of the present specimen, since it follows closely that conventional to drama of the sort. A young Negro who has distinguished himself in one way or another, usually on the battlefield, returns to his home in the South full of optimism that the change in world affairs has wrought an equal change in respect to his race. What he finds is disillusion. Though persecuted and hounded because of his color, he nevertheless resolves to remain among his white enemies and battle for understanding of his brothers. The plays may vary in minor detail, as does this one, but in sum they are identical. Mr. Ardrey is, however, to be complimented, if surely not for the quality of his often over-melodramatic writing and his submission to many of the stencils of the standard plot, at least for foregoing the easy indignations of miscegenation. Though at one point he can not resist entirely the usual impulse to drag it in, he does it only by implication and indirection and offers it as no crux of his dramaturgy. Such miscegenation has long been the mortgage-on-the-farm and the stolen-papers of playwrights given to a consideration of the Negro problem, yet basically it has no more to do with that problem than the Negro's suppressed urge to ape the white man in dress. It is the recourse of box-office-minded writers unpossessed of the talent to make the dramatically unsensational interesting on its own account and who in their quandary seek to raise what is legitimately and sufficiently eight-point type into a scare-head. While one may not approve of the excessive manner of expression,

it may in this connection be not amiss to quote from an editorial on the subject by the Negro editor of the *Amsterdam News*. Alluding to the miscegenation in the play *Strange Fruit*, he says in part, "Nonnie just happens to be a convenient slopjar in which Tracy befouls himself in the same sort of way a baby messes in his pants to make his mama mad . . . it's good riddance to bad rubbish. Of all the stinking slanders on the Negro ever palmed off by our (white) 'friends' as a 'contribution to the solution of the race problem,' this opus by Lillian Smith undoubtedly takes the cake for insult and slyness."

Where Ardrey's excursion into his subject runs off the tracks and upsets is in his too transparent stacking of the cards against his Negro protagonist, in his showshop dodge of opposing fortissimo whites against his pianissimo blacks, and in his use of billboard brushes to etch most of his characters. That his play still manages to drive across the footlights is therefore something of a paradox. But, paradox or not, it does drive, if perhaps much like an old car with little gasoline that has been lucky enough to get an obliging push from the rear. That push in this case is the propulsive power naturally inherent, whatever the quality of its dramatic treatment, in the play's theme.

The evening profited enormously from the performance in the leading role of a newcomer to the professional stage, Ossie Davis. The direction of Mr. Shumlin emphasized too greatly, it seemed, the already emphasized aspects of the script. There were times when the shouting defeated the energy of the dialogue and other times when what life there may have been in certain of the characters was taken out of them by causing them to act like the Gatling guns in the old Sikh rebellion melodramas. Jo Mielziner's sets were atmospherically valid, and his stage lighting, as generally, excellent.

## TRUCKLINE CAFÉ. FEBRUARY 27, 1946

*A play by Maxwell Anderson. Produced by Harold Clurman and Elia Kazan in association with the Playwrights' Company for 13 performances in the Belasco Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

TOBY	Frank Overton	SISSIE	Leila Ernst
KIP	Ralph Theadore	TORY McRAE	Ann Shepherd
STEW	John Sweet	SAGE McRAE	Marlon Brando
MAURICE	Kevin McCarthy	THE BREADMAN	Peter Hobbs
MIN	June Walker	JANET	Peggy Meredith
WING COMMANDER HERN	David Manners	MILDRED	June March
ANNE CARRUTH	Virginia Gilmore	BIMI	Richard Paul
STAG	Karl Malden	TUFFY GARRETT	Eugene Steiner
ANGIE	Irene Dalley	MAN WITH A PAIL	Lou Gilbert
CELESTIE	Joanne Tree	FIRST MAN	Solen Hayes
PATROLMAN GRAY	Robert Simon	FIRST WOMAN	Lorraine Kirby
EVVIE GARRETT	Joann Dolan	SECOND MAN	Joseph Anthony
HUTCH	Kenneth Tobey	SECOND WOMAN	Rose Steiner
MATT	Louis A. Florence	MORT CARRUTH	Richard Waring
JUNE	Jutta Wolf	FIRST GIRL	Ann Morgan
		SECOND GIRL	Gloria Stroock

*SYNOPSIS: Scene. Interior of a diner café on the Ocean Highway between Los Angeles and San Francisco. Act I. After dark. Act II. Toward eleven next morning. Act III. After eleven that evening.*

*Director: Harold Clurman.*

**M**R. ANDERSON'S EXHIBIT indicates once again that in his bout with the late war he has come out a bad second. It has been a valiantly persistent tussle on his part; he has not flinched for a moment in his efforts to triumph over it in script; but, like other of his buddies who have put on the gloves in an attempt to subdue it to their dramatic ends, he has not been equal to it.

In the first round, he jumped the American bell with what he evidently esteemed as a haymaker. It was called *Key Largo* and dealt with the germinal phases of the war in terms of the Fascist encroachment upon Spain. Hoping

to achieve a knockout in mankind's baffled quest of a faith to live by and die for, he substituted so much bantam blank verse and so many one-finger intermezzi for simple and forthright drama that the final impression was of a toy music box ambitiously debating a machine gun. Here and there were little clusters of better writing, if in philosophical content scarcely alcoholic, but they seemed like bouquets thrown onto a stage whose curtain had not gone up. Shaw, to quote again his often repeated observation of Sardou, said that it was the latter's habit to keep his drama sedulously off-stage and to have it announced periodically by letters and telegrams. Anderson frequently followed suit, using in their stead penny valentines.

The second round brought *Candle In The Wind*, which also jumped the bell and treated of France in the first stages of the occupation. Here, our challenger negotiated what was basically little more than the old-time melodrama of Hal Reid and Co., which, stemming from that of Sardou, was bewitched by the business of lodging its heroes in jail for one reason or another and spending the rest of the evenings showing the determined efforts of its heroines to get them out. The only difference in Mr. Anderson's salvo was that his Scarpia was a Nazi, his heroine was not called upon to sacrifice her virtue to accomplish the hero's release, and the release was not effected by a tearful appeal to the mercy of the Governor of a state or, as when they used to drag in Abe Lincoln, or the President of the nation. The author's attempt to give his play a semblance of size by injecting into it the serums of Andersonian philosophy did not at all help matters. It remained an inflation of counterfeit currency.

Round three took the form of *The Eve Of St. Mark*. By this time we were in the war and the challenger's purpose was to impress us, through the person of a humble farm lad, that we were of the stuff of which great, silent heroes are made and that the forces of evil would not stand the ghost of a chance against us. Abandoning for the most part his former papered-comb lyricism, Mr. Anderson on this occasion made a simpler and relatively more acceptable

job of things, though the play as a whole amounted critically to very little and the war still had him hanging on to the ropes. For, after all, a national anthem may be allowed to lose much of its stimulation if in a dramaturgical paraphrase it is interrupted, as it here was, by a load of sticky mother-love rhetoric, stage visions that needed only a scrim cut-out showing Jane Cowl in a white dress picking black-eyed susans to make the Selwyns recollectively blush in embarrassment, recreant juke-box sex, and such rewritten George M. Cohan Yankee Doodle sentiments as "Dad, it seemed wrong, when there was only one important thing to do in the world, to look the other way and let somebody else do it. I know you thought I was coming back to the farm . . . but . . . I want to get out there where the fighting's going on. . . . I want to pay for my ticket!"

The fourth round was *Storm Operation*, another testimonial to our valor in the face of battle, and one that came near to putting our Max down for the count. Cerebration presently achieved its climax in the author's profound conviction that "The best soldier is the one with a picture of a girl in his pocket," which might, one fears, let out a whole lot of rookies from Hannibal to George Patton. Among the other ingredients were a cute blonde nurse whose love problems were introduced when danger from enemy attack was most threatening, comic relief in the shape of a soldier given to vaudeville double-talk and of sexual wheezes founded on the photograph of a woman in a bathing suit, a solemn Krausmeyer's Alley set-to between a British and an American officer which concluded with the stereotyped genial and expansive backslapping, the Little Eva demise of an Arab girl with a white-face Uncle Tom doughboy bent moistly over her bier, etc.

We arrive at the fifth and final round and this *Truckline Café*. Mr. Anderson now busies himself in a consideration of the post-war scene, principally in terms of returned servicemen and the biological indiscretions of their womenfolk while they were away. In the consideration, he finds himself on the mat shortly after the first curtain goes up and remains there groaning until the last curtain gives him the



full count. What he has handed out is only a very feeble poke at the combined themes of Sherwood's *The Petrified Forest* and Kubly's *Men To The Sea*, and not only a very feeble one but one that is often absurd.

In this particular clash with the war, the challenger is like the old Harry Watson burlesque skit about Philadelphia Jack O'Brien in which Harry engaged in such a ferocious fight with himself that he knocked himself out with his own prowess. Mr. Anderson is, even more, a solo Battle Royal, wildly stabbing the air in all directions and breathlessly giving himself a steady succession of solar plexus blows. He tackles everything in sight from the faithlessness of soldiers' wives and its emotional consequences to récipés for the world's felicity, from low comedy sex to the literature of Joyce and the scientific discoveries of Einstein, and from the promiscuity humor of his own roadside saloon scene in *The Eve Of St. Mark* to the sailor humor out of Shiffrin's *Love On Leave*. And when the materials get through with him, there is little left of him but the recollection of a lightweight with Joe Louis ambitions and without even Max Baer's sense of the ridiculous.

Mr. Anderson should be taken aside by his seconds and should be told that one can not fight the war's aftermath with such omniscience as the need for understanding "because enough people have been killed already in the world" and such prophylaxis as "Long underwear is often a moral influence." He should also be warned, before he presents his dramaturgy to critical scrutiny, that characters must be independently delineated by a playwright and not merely described to an audience by other characters, that his habit of explaining his characters' emotions is stealing their prerogative, and that it isn't a bad idea to show an audience a play's obligatory scene and not, as here in the case of the cabin one between the murder-impelled husband and his derelict wife, keep it out of sight and have it later echoed by a pair of frightened girls in swim suits and other such desultory messengers. And while they are about it, his seconds might further urge our Slapsie Maxie to have done once and for all with the kind of dramatic writ-

ing that resorts to such stencils as "Maybe I ought to tell you" and such devices as causing extras to wander in for no other perceivable purpose than momentarily to interrupt and supposedly reanimate long dialogic passages. And later on, when he is out of the hospital, they might beneficially suggest to him that he read up on the divorce statistics and hesitate in the future to hawk such philosophies as maintain that the one way to make a marriage permanent is for the parties thereto to give birth to a child.

The stage direction did nothing to alleviate matters; Boris Aronson's setting was sternly conventional; and the acting company, except for Virginia Gilmore and Marlon Brando, was in major part second-rate.

The occasion's small enlivenment was provided by a large advertisement placed in the *New York Times*, after the daily newspaper reviewers' notices were in, by the Messrs. Clurman and Kazan, the co-producers of the play and the former its stage director. Headed "To The Theatre Going Public," it read in part:

"We are going to close our production of Maxwell Anderson's *Truckline Café* at the Belasco Theatre on March 9 which is a week from tomorrow. The reports on the play by the men who write the reviews make no other course possible. But we will not let this play disappear from the scene without saying a few things that are in our minds, and on the minds of a good number of other people working in the New York theatres. Our theatre is strangled in a bottleneck. That bottleneck is made up of a group of men who are hired to report the events of our stage and who more and more are acquiring powers which, as a group, they are not qualified to exercise — either by their training or by their taste. And it is increasingly becoming the case that these men are deciding what plays are given hearings, what plays make up the institution which is our theatre, and what plays are never given a chance to find their audience. The sorriest aspect of the situation is that the mass of professional theatre people, including some of the most talented men in America, are impotent in the

situation, and can do nothing more about it than bemoan the state of affairs privately and talk vaguely about doing something. Nothing is ever done, no opposition point of view is ever expressed. There is a blackout of all taste except the taste of these men.

*"Truckline Café* has faults, but is a kind of play that, in our opinion, every real theatre lover should see. That is why we did it. . . . It entertains, it amuses. . . . We believe in entertainment. This play entertains abundantly — but it is due a much greater measure of respect, and attention and concern for what it says about us, about all our lives. If a dramatic standard which excludes just about everything except neatness and belly-laughes, and which takes no cognizance of what a play tries to say should become the rule of our stage, then the best playwrights will continue to be driven from our stage and the resultant impoverishment of our theatre will be the responsibility of all of us who allow the critics to have their way unchallenged."

There is much truth in what the Messrs. Clurman and Kazan say, though they have committed the error of picking the wrong play about which to say it and so have made what they say nonsensical. The further circumstance that they both are disappointed excursionists from Hollywood, where their principal activities lie, makes it not only nonsensical but maudlin.

## LITTLE BROWN JUG. MARCH 6, 1946

*A play by Marie Baumer. Produced by Courtney Burr for 5 performances in the Martin Beck Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

IRENE HASKELL	IRA	<i>Percy Kilbride</i>
<i>Katharine Alexander</i>	LYDIA	<i>Frieda Altman</i>
HENRY BARLOW	MICHAEL ANDREWS	<i>Arthur Kranz</i>
<i>Ronald Alexander</i>	NORMAN BARLOW	
CAROL BARLOW	<i>Marjorie Lord</i>	<i>Arthur Margetson</i>

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *Henry Barlow's combined lodge and boat house in Maine. A late March evening, 1945.* Scene 2. *Irene Haskell's house in Connecticut. Afternoon in early May.* Act II. Scene 1. *The same, a few weeks later. Early afternoon.* Scene 2. *The same, a few hours later.* Act III. *The same, a few hours later still.*

Director: *Gerald Savory.*

THIS IS WHAT IS KNOWN in Broadway terminology as a psychological thriller. A psychological thriller is at bottom an old-time Bowery melodrama played as if it had been born on this side of the railroad tracks and in which one of the leading characters drives another out of his or her wits through mental processes which most often drive the reviewers equally out of theirs. We have had no less than a dozen specimens of the peculiar shape of entertainment in the last three seasons, which may possibly account in some degree for the eccentric manifestations of much of current local drama criticism, apparently so bewildering to the Messrs. Clurman, Kazan and Anderson.

The aforesaid mental processes, though largely of a piece, take various superficial forms. Sometimes the character puts the so-called psychology into operation out of a sheer exuberance of perversity and for the sadistic pleasure of watching his victim squirm. Sometimes, fancying himself a deviously superior brain, he exercises it toward the black-mailing of a party innocent of a crime but under the shadow of circumstantial evidence. At other times, he

maneuvers it, in the interests of the law, toward a confession of his subject's guilt. At still other times, in such plays as boast an expensively designed drawing-room, a star actress dressed by Valentina, and a butler, he often simply sits around in silence, save for a scene in which he amorously makes up to a secondary actress dressed by Abraham and Straus, and slowly psychologizes the star into a conniption fit by gazing at her as fixedly as if she were a chart at the optician's. And, at yet other times, he combines at least three of the procedures to such splendid effect that in the end he psychologizes himself straight into the hoosegow.

In most cases, the character operated upon is made such an ass by the playwright and is so devoid of common sense that he either doesn't suspect for a moment what the psychology-monger is up to or, if he does, apprehensively comport himself toward him as if he believed the cops had disappeared with the Keystone films. This, of course, as the playwrights appreciate, is of enormous help to them, since otherwise, as the saying goes, there would be no play, which is nonsense, for there would not only be a play but a dam-site better one. The majority of these psychological thrillers thus provide an automatic criticism of their authors. There are probably not more than half a dozen playwrights living in the world today who are able to pitch a pair of characters of equal strength against each other and derive drama other than the purely didactic from them. The thriller writers betray themselves as little more than shell-game cons who employ two transparent shells, and no pea.

They furthermore most frequently are all thumbs in the manipulation of their profitless swindles. Once in a great while they seem to be able to devise feints and dodges that lend their game some little go and persuasion, but generally they are so lacking in cunning that the people in their tent soon wander off in the direction of the elephants. Aside from *Angel Street*, which at that owed considerably more to its actors, scene designer and stage lighting than to its author, there has not been one of the psychological thrillers in a long time now that has been essentially other than one of the above remarked past jitney melodramas with

sinister facial contortions substituted for pistols, portentously slow-paced dialogue for the quick, simple variety, and a load of schoolroom psychophysics for the good, old-fashioned and much more convincing wrestle on the canyon's edge.

Even the stage business shows a lack of the dramatic imagination demonstrated in a number of the pre-Freud thumpers. The hat-box on the mantel containing a dismembered portion of the murdered woman which was relied upon for suspense and shiver in a *Night Must Fall* didn't touch the suspense and shiver of, for example, the simple, ominous bell cord in the bedroom of *The Speckled Band* down which the poisonous snake was imminently due to crawl. The body in the ottoman in a *Murder Without Crime* didn't jounce an audience one-tenth so prosperously as, for another example, the fluttering of the leaves of a book which indicated that the invisible seeker of revenge was present in the room of *The Unknown Purple*. And all the supposedly betraying cobblers' knives in *The Strangers* and all the foreboding mittens in the *Hand In Gloves* haven't strummed the audiences' spines in anything remotely like the way they were strummed by the slow ticking of the doomful infernal machine in *The Fatal Card*, the dripping of blood in *The Girl Of The Golden West*, or even the mysterious, death-dealing cabinet in *In The Next Room*.

Miss Baumer's brain-child does not, I fear, materially alter the status of the later day species. It falls into the category of the character who utilizes his psychological virtuosity to blackmail ends and who feathers a nest for himself by frightening the life out of a female with sly reminders of an episode out of her immediate past, in this instance the possibility of an accident being construed as murder. The female in question is arbitrarily made the customary imbecile who never until final curtain time thinks of ridding herself of the bore by the simple expedient of calling up the police and handing him over, which may make for something that runs from eight-forty until eleven but hardly a play.

On this occasion, the psychology merchant's reminders are no more inventive than a one-finger playing of a hintful tune on the piano or the periodic significant pulling out of a watch that belonged to the deceased. In the older exhibits the rascal agitated his victim, wrongfully suspected of having killed a man with an Indian club, by humming "Hiawatha" at such critical moments as Patrolman Murphy wandered in, or if his victim had a prison record of which the rascal alone was aware, by meaningfully drawing out of his pocket the dice that had been tossed by them to determine which would be the first to make the jail breakaway. Miss Baumer for good measure also hauls out again the old last act business of cornering the scoundrel by falsely accusing him of having put poison in the brandy and detecting his earlier guilt through his fumbling confusion.

The dialogue is of an "I don't know whether to laugh or be angry" flavor, and the characters include the cook who hands in her notice because she "can't stand the strange goings on in the house."

Gerald Savory directed the play as if it were a six-hour Chinese drama and in no need of getting going too quickly, and the acting was relevantly neutral.

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### THREE TO MAKE READY. MARCH 7, 1946

*A revue with sketches and lyrics by Nancy Hamilton and music by Morgan Lewis. Produced by Stanley Gilkey and Barbara Payne for a rest of the season's performances in, initially, the Adelphi Theatre.*

#### CAST

Ray Bolger, Brenda Forbes, Rose Inghram, Gordon MacRae, Harold Lang, Jane Deering, Bibi Osterwald, Arthur Godfrey, Althea Elder, Meg Mundy, Mary Alice Bingham, Mary McDonnell, Edythia Turnell, Candace Montgomery, Iris Linde, Garry Davis, Joe Johnson, Carleton Carpenter, Martin Kraft, Jack Purcell, Irwin Charles, Jimmy Venable, Jim Elsegood.

Directors: John Murray Anderson and Margaret Webster.

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WITHOUT RAY BOLGER and a very pretty dancing girl with topaz hair and slit, smiling eyes whose name I could not extricate from a highly inconsiderate, aye despicable program, I am afraid that this successor to *One For The Money* and *Two For The Show* would not amount to much. When Bolger and his expert feet occupy the stage, things are satisfactory, and when that girl is around, even with her feet on the ground, one at least has something to think about. But otherwise the evening is not exactly dynamite.

One of its moister blankets is Nancy Hamilton. Arranging marriages is hardly part of my profession, but I should like to fix one up, and quickly, for Miss Nancy. It would be immensely beneficial to her to marry the man at the switch-board whose job is the blacking-out of sketches. That is, if the man is of the stern, bossy sort who won't take any back-talk from women. Such a one would pull the switch on Miss Nancy's sketches fully five minutes before she wants it to be pulled and would improve them three or four hundred percent. The lady simply does not know when there is too much of a thing and when it is time to stop. Several of her skits might be fairly amusing if cut down to about half their length, but she lets them go on



and on long after the juice has run out of them. Her husband, if he loved her, would do wonders for her. Among other things, and in addition to pulling the switch on the sketches, he would pull a different kind of one on his wife and apply it to her thitherward parts for any such item as that laid in a bathroom and in which the actors embarrass themselves and the audience with business involving a watercloset.

But before she gets married, Miss Nancy might profitably take certain other matters under advisement. It would be well for her to meditate, for example, that imitating Noel Coward in a sketch like *Post Mortem* is perhaps not the wisest course to pursue, since not only is she unable to catch the Coward tone and manner, such as they are, but Coward has been imitating himself for so long now that he isn't very funny any more. It would also be well for her to reflect, for another example, that though a skit like *The Story of the Opera* was originally moderately entertaining, if twice too extended, when it was shown in an earlier revue, it is not entertaining enough to be repeated so soon, if ever. And, finally, she might reconsider her lyrics and persuade herself, however grudgingly, that a little fresher imagination would not be a bad thing and that the kind represented in the songs "If It's Love" and "A Lovely, Lazy Kind Of Day" have been written a thousand times better by Oscar Hammerstein and in "And Why Not I?" nine-hundred-and-ninety-nine better by the late Larry Hart and the still extant Cole Porter.

The show in its entirety suffers from the same lack of fertility. By this time we surely have been surfeited with opening numbers much like "It's A Nice Night For It," in which the stage manager and his colleagues introduce the evening's exhibit the while the chorus dances at the audience with expansive grins suggesting that what is to follow is not only going to tickle it but everybody else to death. We have also from past experience begun to doubt the advisability of hiring masters of ceremonies in the inappropriate persons of second-rate vaudeville actors, non-theatrical luminaries in painfully new dress clothes, and radio

comics like, in this instance, Arthur Godfrey, and of having them either announce the various acts with such dreary humor that the acts have a time of it overcoming the handicap imposed upon them, or on their own account give out with monologues or songs which are designed to kill time and which gratuitously augment the homicide by killing the audience.

Mr. Godfrey is a particularly morbid specimen. He may, for all I know, be a veritable riot on the radio and may convulse that contraption's quaint trade from one end of the country to the other, but his talents are scarcely perceptible in a theatre. He is of the species who believe that an affectedly casual and indifferent demeanor will convince everyone that they know the stage like a book and are as at home on it as Charles Hawtrey. He is also the kind of performer who imagines that if, with no further trouble, you simply toss off a poor joke as if it were a jigger of schnapps, it will have the same alcoholic effect upon an audience. And he does not seem to realize that bringing a chair down to the footlights, languorously depositing one's person in it and singing a song as if it didn't greatly interest one may be effective if one is Yvette Guilbert, Raymond Hitchcock or Mary Martin but that, if one isn't, the impression will very likely be of someone who would be a lot better off backed by Count Basie's band and the Rockettes.

The bigger stage numbers are, in addition, hardly aglow with fancy or novelty. "Barnaby Beach" duplicates the old silhouette lighting device, familiar since the days when Hassard Short was still a child. The first act finale, "An American Tragedy" as it would be done by the Rodgers and Hammerstein of *Oklahoma!* and *Carousel*, does little but introduce elements of those musicals and attribute them to characters who are much less Dreiser's than Rouben Mamoulian's. The "Romeo and Juliet" number danced by Jane Deering, who should forego too much pink makeup, and Harold Lang, who could stand some, does not go beyond a balcony in a scenery cutout conveniently supplied with steps down which Miss Deering may safely

descend. And the finish with the company seated at up-stage tables in what one presumes is a restaurant but which more vividly resembles a boudoir in a Lubitsch epic was considered somewhat backward even in the period when George Lederer was operating at the Casino.

Reverting to the sketches, there is further nothing too comically surprising in a shoe store scene wherein a female customer drives the salesman frantic in trying on innumerable pairs of shoes and then, abruptly taking her departure, observing that she stopped in only to pass the time until the hour of an engagement. Or in one showing a number of suburban females taking a Russian lesson—it has hitherto been French—and experiencing the customary hypothetically amusing difficulties in pronunciation. Or in one the humor of which consists in the confused and garbled recital of the plot of a Wagner opera.

The tunes by Morgan Lewis which serve as an accompaniment to all this are of the kind which, if you haven't heard their like before, is probably because you either do not get around much or your radio and phonograph have been out of order for the last ten years.

In conclusion, it is Bolger who is the show so far as there is one. Along with that girl of the pale sherry hair and the eyes that look as if she were, like many in the audience, happily half-asleep.

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 FLAMINGO ROAD. MARCH 19, 1946

*A play by Robert and Sally Wilder, based on the former's novel of the same title. Produced by Rowland Stebbins for 7 performances in the Belasco Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

BOATRIGT	Olvestor Polk	GOLDIE	Martha Jensen
TITUS SEMPLE	Francis J. Felton	ANOTHER GIRL	Sally Carthage
FIELDING CARLISLE	Lauren Gilbert	LANE BALLOU	Judith Parrish
HENRY VEECH	Frank McNellis	BURRELL LASSEN	Tom Morrison
"DOC" WATTERSON	Will Geer	"RED"	Marcella Markham
DAN CURTIS	Philip Bourneuf	MATRON	Hazele Burgess
ULEE JACKSON	Paul Ford	VIRGIE	Evelyn Davis
TATE HADLEY	Bernard Randall	GROCERY BOY	Mahlon Nail
LUTE-MAE SAUNDERS	Doris Rich		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *The front porch of the Palmer House. Late afternoon.* Scene 2. *The same. Six weeks later.* Act II. Scene 1. *The yard of the Women's Prison Farm. One month later.* Scene 2. *A room at Lute-Mae Saunders'. Two months later.* Act III. Scene 1. *Living-room at 32 Flamingo Road. A few weeks later.* Scene 2. *The front porch of the Palmer House. An hour later.*

Director: José Ruben.

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THE BILL is still another sample of the Boss drama, of which we have had an ample stock both before and since Edward Sheldon, dazzled by George Ohnet's *The Iron-master*, beset the stage thirty-five years ago with a play named simply after the pigeonhole. These plays, in essence not too dissimilar, were originally centered on the character of a successful, obdurate and uncompromising business man who ran roughshod not only over his associates and help but over his wife and children as well, and four times out of five ended with his obediently moral realization, upon the collapse of his personal happiness, that wealth and power were not everything in the world. The business boss in due course gave way to the political boss. The latter differed from him mainly in that he did not wear a black cutaway coat and, when the room in which

the action occurred got too hot, took off the more bourgeois garment he had on, rolled up his shirt sleeves, and dispatched his chew of tobacco past the hero's ear into the spittoon.

The characters have otherwise varied but little. The business boss of an early Mirbeau *Business Is Business* became the factory boss of a later Sowerby *Rutherford And Son*, with only a change in wardrobe. The political boss of the early melodramas who sent the defiant heroine to jail has become the political boss who sends her to jail in *Flamingo Road*, with only his black mustache shaved off but with not less of a pot-belly. Now and again, as in Fagan's *The Earth* and Weitzenkorn's *Five Star Final*, the business or political boss has been converted into a newspaper boss, but still with liberal facets of business and politics. And in the more recent war years, he has taken on a military dictator flavor. But at bottom it is the same old bird of another day and age, and traveling much the same thematic path.

*Flamingo Road* is one of the worst examples of the species, being little more than ten-twenty-thirty melodrama offered at inflated prices. It is also not only one of the worst but one of the most ridiculous. Its political boss is made such an unrelieved villain that even in the period of the peanut gallery an audience would have whistled at him, and his persistently bitter pursuit of the little heroine needs only a saw-mill or some railroad tracks to make one think back to the days when eggs enjoyed other privileges than omelets. The casting of the vicious character in the person of a genial former musical show comedian named Felton, like the recent casting of a quondam engaging comedy actor for the villain of *Little Brown Jug*, is a trick that does not work. Instead of minimizing the character's objectionable qualities, it paradoxically heightens them. If Alfred Lunt, for example, were to be cast as Simon Legree, Simon would seem twice as odious as he usually does. Such casting, instead of glossing over villainy, doubly emphasizes it, since the incidence of contrast between agreeable personality and dastardly act becomes just that much more unpleasant.

The one and only contribution of the play to the historical record is its articulation, for the first time on an American stage, of a certain four-letter word. Aside from that dubious distinction, the only shock which it provides is that induced by the thought that any such hitherto distinguished producer as Mr. Stebbins should have associated his name with it. That gentleman might better have adhered to his original intention of closing the play after a view of it in its road tryout and thus spared himself further odium. The season would have provided him, both before and after, with a plenty of sympathetic company. Whether for purposes of rewriting or permanent interment, at least twenty-seven ventures were thus cautiously withheld from metropolitan scrutiny, among them *Between Covers*, *Salute To Murder*, *Judy O'Connor*, *One Shoe Off*, *Mr. Cooper's Left Hand*, *Miss Jones*, *Twilight Bar*, *St. Lazare's Pharmacy*, *Caviar To The General*, *Questionable Ladies*, *Dearly Beloved*, *Second Guesser*, *Portrait In Black*, *Crescendo*, *Emily*, *Georgia Boy*, *Gift For The Bride*, *By Appointment Only*, *Forever Is Now*, *Last House On The Left*, *Of All People, You Twinkle Only Once*, *West Of The Moon*, and *Lambs Will Gamble*.

Adding to the ineptitude of the occasion was some felonious acting and direction, to say nothing of the authors' alteration of the novel's ending into a *soi-disant* happy one. This happiness took the form of the shooting of the political boss by the girl he had persecuted, followed by the solemn prevarication of another character that the boss had whispered to him with his dying breath that the shots had been fired from a passing automobile. Inasmuch as the coroner, however obtuse, would readily have determined that the shots had been fired from only two feet away and that the position of the dead man clearly indicated that the holes in his body could not conceivably have come from the direction of the road, the only happiness that could possibly be derived from the ending was considerably less than of the audience than of the credulous playwrights.

## HE WHO GETS SLAPPED. MARCH 20, 1946

*A revival of the Andreyev play in a new version by Judith Guthrie. Produced by the Theatre Guild for 46 performances in the Booth Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

TILLY	Bobby Barry	EQUESTRIENNE	Cynthia Blake
POLLY	John M. O'Connor		{ Phil Sheridan
COUNT MANCINI	John Abbott	TAP DANCING TRIO	{ Jack Orton
PAPA BRIQUET	Wolfe Barzell		{ Leatta Miller
ZINAIDA	Stella Adler	STRONG MAN	Paul Alberts
FUNNY	Dennis King		Cynthia Carlin
JIM JACKSON	Russell Collins		Letitia Fay
CONSUELA	Susan Douglas	DANCERS	{ Sydna Scott
ALFRED BEZANO	Jerome Thor		{ Jackie Jones
A GENTLEMAN	Tom Rutherford		{ Elsbeth Fuller
BARON REGNARD			{ Michael Wyler
	Reinhold Schunzel	CLOWNS	{ Joseph Singer
HOUSEKEEPER	Edith Shayne		{ Carl Specht
RINGMASTER	Arthur Foran		{ Douglas Hudelson
1ST JOCKEY	George Cory	JUGGLERS	{ Frank de Silva
2ND JOCKEY	Tony Albert		{ Robin Taylor
3RD JOCKEY	Ellis Eringer	WAITER	Frank de Silva
THOMAS, HEAD USHER			
	Ernest Sarracino		

Scene. *Backstage of a circus in a city in France.*

Time. *About 1919.*

Director: *Tyrone Guthrie.*

THE ORMOLU was first produced by the Theatre Guild almost a quarter-century ago when it was still the local predilection indiscriminately to read into any Russian drama, however incomplex, profoundly symbolic meanings worthy of Ibsen, who suffered even worse from the predilection more than a quarter-century earlier. It is plain that the play is somewhat less transparent than, say, *Life With Father*, just as a window a bit clouded by a drizzle of rain is less so than one in the sunshine; but it nevertheless remains handily penetrable to anyone who does not arbi-

trarily imagine it to be rich stained glass. It is accordingly in this later day handicapped theatrically, since there remain relatively few playgoers who believe that dramatic culture lies in puzzling themselves over the essentially simple portentously expressed in unsimple terms and who are not satisfied unless they can distort a dramatist's innocent purport to their own eccentric ends.

If any of the Russian plays is as open as a book it is this of Andreyev's, as he himself growled when several critical fellow-countrymen professed, loudly, to find its meaning obscure. A man whose wife has been unfaithful to him is so disgusted that he joins up with a circus and gets a job in it as a clown. The job is doubly to his taste, since it emphasizes his denial of the outside world and permits him to make acidulous remarks to the people of it. When the man who seduced his wife one day shows up in contrition, he is already so far removed from the other's sphere that he doesn't give a hoot. But love for a beautiful young bare-back rider presently infects him and when he is unsuccessful in preventing her marriage to a degenerate oldster, whose wealth her supposed father is not averse to, he poisons her and then commits suicide.

The pessimism, here as in other of the author's plays, runs pretty high at times and brought forth Tolstoy's disparaging "Andreyev says 'Boo,' but I refused to be scared." We may similarly observe that when Andreyev says such supposedly recondite things as "Sometimes one makes fun, and suddenly it turns out to be true; the stars never talk in vain; if sometimes it is difficult for a human being to open his mouth and to say a word, how difficult it must be for a star" — when he says such things, we refuse to be puzzled. We simply, like Tolstoy, grin them away. And when he delivers such others as "Beauty has her fool; wisdom, too; oh, how many fools she has; her court is overcrowded with enamored fools and the sound of slaps does not cease, even through the night" — we refuse not only to be puzzled but even to grin, since all they are is the wholly obvious expressed in terms of the partly highfalutin.

The relic was not helped by staging so overswollen that



the script frequently got lost in it, nor by acting generally so overdirected and excessive that at times it was difficult not to imagine it was that of the wild animals in the adjacent circus ring. The new adaptation was an improvement over the too literal one with which we previously had been regaled, but beyond that the evening seemed like a long past theatrical one played by an even longer past stock company directed by a Rip Van Winkle who had gone to sleep in Berlin twenty years ago and had not yet wholly awakened in a changed dramatic world.

## I LIKE IT HERE. MARCH 22, 1946

*A comedy by A. B. Shiffrin. Produced by William Cahn for 51 performances in the Golden Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

MR. SMEDLEY	Seth Arnold	BRAD MONROE	William Terry
CAPTAIN LEROUX	John Effrat	WILLIE KRINGLE	Oscar Karlweis
LAURA MERRIWEATHER		DAVID BELLOW	Donald Randolph
	Mardi Bryant	SAPHRONIA LAWRENCE	
MATILDA MERRIWEATHER			Ellis Baker
	Beverly Bayne		
SEBASTIAN MERRIWEATHER			
	Bert Lytell		

**SYNOPSIS:** *The entire action takes place in the New England home of the Merriweathers. Act I. A Saturday afternoon, in late summer. Act II. Scene 1. Several weeks later. Sunday. Scene 2. A few weeks later. (Curtain will be lowered during Scene 2 to denote the passing of two hours.) Act III. Weeks later.*

Director: Charles K. Freeman.

**I**N THE THEATRE, when a female character with a foreign accent descends upon a household, the odds are that before the final curtain drops she will have raised havoc, usually in an amatory direction, with the members of it. When, on the other hand, a male character with an accent enters, the odds are equally sizable that by the end of the play he will, through his lovable offices, have set the troubled household to rights. The leading character in *I Like It Here* is the male with the accent and *I Like It Here* thus naturally falls into the routine slot.

In an effort partly to camouflage the slot, the author has embossed his contraption with little frescoes of what doubtless infatuate him as pungent contemporary philosophies. He states, richly, that a naturalized American is a better American than a born one, since he selected America whereas the other had no choice in the matter. He meditates, solemnly, that in certain quarters in America today

there is an intolerance which resembles that practised by the Nazis. He argues, gravely, that what America needs is not self-seeking politicians but men who have the welfare of the country at heart. He shakes his head, learnedly, over the indisposition of good citizens to get together and correct the existing evils. He does all this and more, and at endless length, but not only does the old slot remain stubbornly in constant evidence but gets out of any possible working order through such plugged nickels which he drops into it.

He contributes additionally to the misdemeanor by inserting into the slot enough antiquated situations and humor to stock a dozen other such mechanical comedies. He does not neglect the prescriptive scene in which the worm of a husband gets drunk and puts his domineering wife in her place. He imports again the scene in which the two suitors for the ingénue's hand get into a fist fight, resulting in a profusely bleeding nose on the part of the less likely of the twain and the comic treatment of the organ by the character who sympathizes with the other suitor. He does not miss the joke about the Ming vase that came from Macy's. He resorts to the Chippendale article of furniture treasured by the wife and the deliberate breaking of it by the fed-up husband. He has recourse to the comedy involving the loud vacuum cleaner, the wrong telephone number, and mistaken identity. He even brings on for a last curtain laugh a large, mangy dog.

Mr. Shiffrin is, in short, a shameless fellow and he has concocted a shameful play. Oscar Karlweis, an able comedian, tried heroically to lift the dead weight into the region of humor and at widely spaced intervals partly succeeded through sheer will-power. But Oscar was the only trace of an Oscar in the otherwise unrewarding proceedings.

Most of the rest of the acting would have given pause even to a staunch admirer of Luther Adler. Bert Lytell interpreted the role of the husband, a professor of English literature in a New England university, chiefly by sucking at a pipe, importantly putting on and taking off his horn-rimmed spectacles, and professorially pronouncing "enthu-

siasm" as "enthusiasm" and "bacchanalia" as "back-an-alley." Beverly Bayne, as the wife, spent the evening running up stairs in one dress and coming down in another, all hideous. As the daughter, Mardi Bryant dutifully followed her up and down but with a considerably lesser wardrobe, which imposed upon her the necessity for a little more acting which, since they had not provided the poor girl with the materials for it, further imposed upon her the necessity for running in and out of doors in order to conceal the fact. William Terry, a moving picture actor, conveyed the romantic nature of the successful suitor by playing throughout with his eyes dreamily closed; and as the losing suitor Donald Randolph indicated his natty objectionableness by speaking his lines the way Jan Kiepura would sing them and by sporting the widest pairs of trousers seen on a stage since the days when the burlesque show Irish comedians came on and had gallons of water poured into theirs by their German alter egos.

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 MARY OF MAGDALA. MARCH 25, 1946

*A play by Ernest Milton. Produced by the Blackfriars' Guild for 21 performances in the Blackfriars' Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

ZILLAH	<i>Gladys Edgecomb</i>	ORONTES	<i>Ralph Curtis</i>
BODMIN	<i>Douglas Gordon</i>	RACHEL	<i>Florence Interrante</i>
QUINTUS SUPERBUS	<i>Ray Colcord</i>	ZUBULUN	<i>Oskar Soroko</i>
ELKAN	<i>Joseph Nash</i>	TAMMUZADAD	<i>Joseph F. Gilbert</i>
PAPPUS	<i>Jay Welles</i>	MARY	<i>Helen Horton</i>
PAMPHYLLA	<i>Jean Lovelace</i>	OTHEMAR	<i>Robert Carroll</i>
IBN-EL-HADJAZ	<i>Hugh Thomas, Jr.</i>	AMIL	<i>Frank Schofield</i>
ZIMORA	<i>Margaret Roberts</i>	ZEPTA	<i>Anne Osterhout</i>
CLEONICE	<i>Barbara Stanton</i>	ALETTA	<i>Jean Spelvin</i>

Producer: *Dennis Gurney.*

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MARY MAGDALEN has been a favorite subject of dramatists over the innumerable years. From the early Miracle plays to their later fifteenth century paraphrases and from Heyse to Maeterlinck and beyond, playwrights have found in her, with varying degrees of success, the materials for theatrical stimulus. Mr. Milton, the present and latest steward, has managed to derive from her only an affected and inert play, and its place in the program of any experimental group like the Blackfriars is something less than debatable. The author leaves the handling of his subject in the pupæ and larvæ stage, imaginatively, spiritually and, above all, dramatically. If this is experiment even remotely deserving of the name, experiment has surely fallen on peculiar days.

The playwright, by profession an actor, and, for the incidental record, one of the most unrestrained on the English stage, exhibits the repentant Magdalen's gradual disgust with the sophisticated society of the period, the lure of the teachings of Jesus, and her eventual abandonment of the sinful life to follow in His holy footsteps. The treatment takes the form of a fingle-fangle mixture of biblical

legend and imitative British facetiousness of the Coward-Novello-Rattigan school. There is, however, nothing offensive in the plan, even to the devout. What offense there is is critical, since the author contrives only theatrical vulgarity where his aim has been religious nicety. Any small effect that the play manages is attributable to the image of the biblical story wholly distinct and apart from what he has done with it.

The physical production was fair enough under the modest circumstances, though the acting was of the kind that relied mostly on merry laughter and expressionless faces to convey the contrast between earthiness on the one hand and spirituality on the other.

# THE SONG OF BERNADETTE. MARCH 26, 1946

*A dramatization of the Franz Werfel novel by Walter and Jean Kerr. Produced by Victor Payne-Jennings and Frank McCoy for 3 performances in the Belasco Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

SISTER MARIE THERESE VAUZOUS	LOUIS BOURIETTE	Anthony Messuri
Jean Mann	BERNARDE CASTEROT	
JEANNE ABADIE Christina Soulias		Gertrude Kinnell
BERNADETTE SOUBIROUS	MADAME SAJOU	Cavada Humphrey
Elizabeth Ross	ANTOINE NICOLAU	Bruce Hall
MARIE SOUBIROUS Pamela Rivers	MAYOR LACADE	Michael Vallon
DEAN PEYRAMALE Klenert Wolff	JACOMET	Richard Karlen
LOUIS SOUBIROUS	DR. DOZOUS	Francis Compton
Marjorie Hurtubise	CELESTE	Octavia Kenmore
SOUBIROUS Whit Vernon	MADAME PERNET	Kay MacDonald
CROISINE BOUHOUHORTS	MOTHER JOSEPHINE	Ruth Gregory
Mimi Norton		

**SYNOPSIS:** Act I. Scene 1. A schoolroom in Lourdes. February, 1858. Scene 2. The Grotto of Massabielle. Half an hour later. Scene 3. The Cachot, home of the Soubtrous. An hour later. Scene 4. The Cachot. Two days later. Act II. Scene 1. The office of Mayor Lacade in Lourdes. Five days later. Scene 2. Dean Peyramale's garden. Two days later. Scene 3. The Grotto. The next day. Scene 4. The Grotto. That night. Act III. Scene 1. The Cachot. A week later. Scene 2. The Convent at Nevers. Ten years later.

Director: Walter Kerr.

THE PROJECT'S HEART is in the right place, but dramatically it suffers from a thrombosis. While the novel circulated its tale of the visionary peasant girl in good, normal order, the play made from it tells the story with such circulatory deficiency that only in one or two scenes is there any trace of pulse. A play must itself move before it can move an audience. This one does not.

Almost any play about miracles enjoys, of course, an initial automatic advantage; and any play that shows one in operation is bound to exercise a measure of audience appeal. The miracle, whatever its nature, seems handily to

substitute for what in a different kind of play is achieved only through expert and doubly imaginative dramaturgy. I have in my time seen at least fifty plays in which miracles of one sort or another have figured, some good, some poor, and ranging all the way from Björnson's *Beyond Human Power* to Moody's *The Faith Healer* and from Ansky's *The Dybbuk* to Doherty's *Father Malachy's Miracle*, and I have yet to see one that did not at the climactic miracle moment fascinate its spectators much as a stage magician would. This is true even when the miracle is partly or wholly bogus, as in Brioux's *False Gods* or Chesterton's *Magic*. The miracle would thus seem to take its place as momentary sure-fire with the sentimental strumming of a piano during a love scene, the appearance of Abe Lincoln, or Gertrude Lawrence's dressmaker. Yet this dramatization provides the otherwise mechanically effective miracle business with a severe challenge. It is so repetitious, so dawdling, so over-melodramatized in certain of its episodes, and so given to such spongy dialogue as "Have you ever felt how soft a little lamb is when you take it in your arms and hold it?" that the play with its hoped for holy vision atmosphere dissolves whimsically into something resembling a pious *Harvey*.

Successful religious plays for the greater part are written either by superior playwrights or hacks. In the one case, as in plays like *Savva*, *Shadow And Substance*, and *The White Steed*, they are projected into the emotions of an audience by deep feeling funneled through the beauty of singing words. In the other, as in such as *Ben Hur*, *Quo Vadis?*, and *The Shepherd King*, they are projected not less auspiciously, if with another and even larger kind of audience, through beguiling externals like treadmill chariot races or a menagerie, usually, in the plays the outlay on which has been relatively frugal, consisting of a pair of retired circus lions or a half dozen sheep. (If the outlay is minute, the lions are dismissed in favor of a couple of stagehands gifted with a vraisemblant bronchitis.) Mr. Kerr, who has the chief responsibility for the present offering, is not a hack and hence has not surrendered to the hack ways in the hope



of guaranteeing his exhibit's success. But he is also very far from being a superior playwright and has not the equipment of language and independent fancy and knowledgeable dramaturgy to convert the Werfel novel into buoyant theatre.

Following the failure of his *The Galilean's Victory* at the hands of the critics, Henry Arthur Jones not a little indignantly wrote, "Those who would deny to dramatists the right to depict religious life upon the stage should show either that religion has become a very unessential and useless portion of human life . . . in which case the playwright can afford to treat it as a naturalist does an organ that has lapsed into a rudimentary state, or they should show why religion should not occupy the same part in the dramatic scheme that it is supposed to occupy in the outer world around him — shall we say one-seventh?" There is obviously no reason in the world why a playwright may not concern himself with religious life. That is not the point. The point more often is that playwrights, however incompetent, who do concern themselves and who produce plays however incompetent still and nevertheless believe that their incompetent plays should be accorded the same reverent and respectful critical attitude which out of the theatre is reserved for their subject matter. As a play, *The Song Of Bernadette*, for all that it deals with the Immaculate Conception, deserves nothing better from drama criticism than any other bad play.

The dramatization was originally intended for and shown in the theatre of the otherwise frequently commendable Catholic University of Washington, D. C., which this season was also responsible for *Lute Song*, infinitely the better theatrical melody of the two. It should not have been permitted to leave its birthplace. With the exception of Elizabeth Ross, as the visionary maiden, and Keinert Wolff, as the Dean of Lourdes, the acting company, along with the direction, had need of a miracle to make it pass even in a summer stable theatre for something worthy of a stage once adorned by Guido Nadzo and Julie Opp.

## WALK HARD. MARCH 27, 1946

*A play by Abram Hill, based on the novel, Walk Hard — Talk Loud, by Len Zinberg. Produced by Gustav Blum for 7 performances in the Chanin Auditorium.*

### PROGRAM

BOBBY	Richard Kraft	SUSIE	Lulu Mae Ward
MACK JEFFRIS	Leonard Yorr	RUTH LAWSON	Dorothy Carter
ANDY WHITMAN	Maxwell Glanville	BARTENDER	John O. Hewitt
MR. BERRY	Fred C. Carter	SADIE	Jean Normandy
LOU FOSTER	Joseph Kamm	DOROTHY	Miriam Pullen
HAPPY	Howard Augusta	GEORGE, THE BELLHOP	Leslie Jones
MICKY	Stephen Elliott	HOTEL CLERK	Richard Kraft
LARRY BATCHELLER	Mickey Walker	LADY FRIEND	Fiona O'Shiel
BECKY	Jacqueline Andre	REPORTER	Edward Kreisler
CHARLIE	Maurice Lisby	ANNOUNCER	Richard Kraft

**SYNOPSIS:** Act I. Scene 1. *A street corner at dusk.* Scene 2. *Lou Foster's office, the next day.* Scene 3. *The Whitman home, the same evening.* Act II. Scene 1. *A Jersey tavern, ten months later.* Scene 2. *A hotel lobby, two weeks later.* Act III. Scene 1. *The ringside, that evening.* Scene 2. *A hotel room, that night.* Scene 3. *Same as Act I, Scene 3, the following morning.*

Director: *Gustav Blum.*

**T**HE PLAY, which tells of the vicissitudes, chiefly race prejudice, experienced by an over-sensitive and contentious Negro prize-fighter, was produced originally in November, 1944, by the American Negro Theatre in Harlem and was reviewed in the *Theatre Book Of The Year, 1944-1945*. In a partly rewritten version, which further lamed an already crippled script, it was brought downtown with an altered acting company by Mr. Blum, who had seemingly persuaded himself, as have other unfortunate producers like him, that there are large monies to be made in these times out of any play or show if only it contain colored folks. It is true that both before and since *Anna Lucasta* was similarly brought down from Harlem and made a for-

tune, many such exhibits have turned a pretty penny. But many, too, have not, despite the unusual place that Negroes have come to occupy on the white stage and in the affections of white audiences. Among these failures have been *Run, Little Chillun*, *South Pacific*, *Blue Holiday*, *Memphis Bound*, *Carib Song*, *Strange Fruit*, *Jeb*, and various others. The idea, in brief, that all one has to do to reap a Broadway harvest is to black up the cast of something like *Little Brown Jug* or *The Duchess Misbehaves* is a through ticket to the storehouse, and even were it not, any such acting and direction as the present production offered would be.

The occasion allowed Mickey Walker, former welter-weight and middle-weight boxing champion, an opportunity to demonstrate his histrionic talents in the role of the Negro pug's Horatio. Compared with most of his performing colleagues, Mr. Walker was a heavy-weight champion.

## ST. LOUIS WOMAN. MARCH 30, 1946

*A musical play with book by Arna Bontemps and Countee Cullen, based on the former's novel, God Sends Sunday, lyrics by Johnny Mercer, and score by Harold Arlen. Produced by Edward Gross for at least a rest of the season's run in the Martin Beck Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

BARFOOT	Robert Pope	DRUM MAJOR	J. Mardo Brown
LITTLE AUGIE	Harold Nicholas	MISSISSIPPI	Milton J. Williams
BARNEY	Fayard Nicholas	DANDY DAVE	Frank Green
LILA	June Hawkins	LEAH	Juanita Hall
SLIM	Louis Sharp	JACKIE	Joseph Eady
BUTTERFLY	Pearl Bailey	CELESTINE	Yvonne Coleman
DELLA GREEN	Ruby Hill	PIGGIE	Herbert Coleman
BIGLOW BROWN	Rex Ingram	JOSHUA	Lorenzo Fuller
RAGSDALE	Elwood Smith	MR. HOPKINS	Milton Wood
PEMBROKE	Merritt Smith	PREACHER	Creighton Thompson
JASPER	Charles Welch	WAITER	Carrington Lewis
THE HOSTESS	Maude Russell		

**SYNOPSIS:** Act I. Scene 1. *A stable, early afternoon of a day in August.* Scene 2. *Biglow's bar, late afternoon, the same day.* Scene 3. *Outside Barney's room, at twilight.* Scene 4. *A ballroom, evening of the same day.* Act II. Scene 1. *Augie's and Della's home, late afternoon, the following week.* Scene 2. *The alley.* Scene 3. *Funeral parlor.* Act III. Scene 1. *Augie's and Della's home, early evening.* Scene 2. *The alley.* Scene 3. *The bar.* Scene 4. *The stable.* Scene 5. *Street corner close to the race track.*

*The action takes place in St. Louis, 1898.*

Director: Rouben Mamoulian.

**I**N A SEASON historically notable for its many unhappy new musical shows, this one came as a comparative bluebird. It has some spirit and color, a fairly serviceable story and several pleasant songs and lyrics, very attractive settings and costumes, and, above all, thank God, no ballets. It has also in the person of a new leading lady, Ruby Hill, the most beautiful and charming young creature that the musical stage has supplied in some time and one who induces

critical repentance at leisure for one's having acted in haste in the earlier case of Miss Sheila Guys, who is nevertheless no mean shakes either. It has, too, its shortcomings. But over-all it at least approaches the kind of article which we had been waiting for since the season began.

Recapitulate what we had undergone in the meantime. Had it not been for the revival of *Show Boat*, the revival of Victor Herbert's score in *The Red Mill*, and the relatively acceptable new *The Day Before Spring*, the general picture would have resembled a barbershop chromo, with fly-specks.

The depression got under way with *Blue Holiday*, a Negro vaudeville so crushing that it buried even Ethel Waters under its avalanche of mediocrity. Next came *Memphis Bound*, a colored excursion into Gilbert and Sullivan with a one-way ticket that left everything high and dry after its first act. Followed *Hollywood Pinafore*, a similar excursion without even the one-way ticket and in which everything was higher and drier considerably sooner. And after *Hollywood Pinafore*, just to make things a little cramped, up popped *Marinka*, that digit which scenarioed the Mayerling affair as if it were about Louis B.

Well, we said to ourselves at this point, a change for the better must come pretty soon, and what came pretty soon, sure enough, was *Mr. Strauss Goes To Boston*, which was even worse than *Marinka*, if such a thing was possible. *Carib Song*, the colored show which next was heaved at us, did not materially improve the situation, in fact, left it just where it was, which is to say in the ashcan. And then, while we were on the mat groaning and writhing in agony, what should descend upon us but *Polonaise* and not only *Polonaise* but Jan Kiepura, a combination to kick the stuffing out of even the most unquenchable optimist.

Well, we again said to ourselves, the American theatre has a reputation for its musical shows and evil days have befallen us but they can't last forever and certainly luck will change and something good will duly show up as it always has in the past. Said we. And what duly showed up as quick as a flash was *The Girl From Nantucket* and, if

you don't remember what *The Girl From Nantucket* was like, go back and reread the chapter on it. *Are You With It?*, the subsequent delivery, was less aggravating than *The Girl From Nantucket* in the sense that one pebble in the shoe is less so than two, but otherwise, though it attracted the by this time desperate trade, failed to animate anyone whose culture had developed slightly beyond such extinct vaudeville entertainment as midgets, serio-comic fat female vocalists, and comedians who extract comedy from a slot machine that doesn't work.

The before-noted *The Day Before Spring*, though deadened by the pair of ghastly ballets, then provided some small, relative relief, and *Billion Dollar Baby*, though nothing to go out in the rain for, at least seemed to the still desperate trade to be worth an umbrella, why, I personally would not know. But the revival of *Desert Song* promptly threw a wet blanket once again on the scene, and *Nellie Bly* poured a ton more water on it. The soaked public was not given a chance to dry. Close on the heels of *Nellie* came *The Duchess Misbehaves* and *The Duchess Misbehaves* doused the public so thoroughly that it contracted theatrical pneumonia. Finally, while it was still under the oxygen tent, *Three To Make Ready* visited the hospital and, aside from Bolger's dancing and that girl, did nothing much to help the patient, though by now the patient was so sick that he apparently didn't know it.

In these generally grim circumstances, the advent of something like this *St. Louis Woman*, whatever its debilities, was and is in the nature of a Broadway windfall. To look again at a handsomely accoutred stage peopled by interesting players, directed with some skill and taste, and for the most part pretty entertaining — at any rate to such persons as after long prostration are still able to tell good from bad — is a pleasure. So grateful is one for small favors that it isn't hard to overlook what in a better season might critically be not easy to take. It would, under such more beneficent conditions, induce some speculation how one could accept that part of the show's plot — an echo of Augustus Thomas' *Arizona* — in which a man is sent to

prison for shooting to death another when it is clear that his revolver was not fired. It would also be a bit bothersome to reconcile some of Harold Arlen's tunes, for just one example the paraphrase of "On The Banks Of The Wabash" called "Lullaby," with any real compositional freshness. It would further be a little hard to explain how one could enjoy a show that begins rolling on all wheels and calls for more axle-grease as it goes on, that does not always satisfactorily orchestrate toughness and sentiment (it is another of the projected hardboiled shows), and that has various other lapses. But while it would be somewhat difficult for criticism, it is easy for any theatregoer who appreciates that half a loaf is better than the no loaf which more regularly he has been getting.

The show, in short, may not be a full meal yet it has enough dishes to make its table anything but bare. In "Legalize My Name," it has a good, saucy sex song, and in "Come Rain Or Come Shine" a balsamic sentimental one. Its cake-walk that ends the first act is excellent sport, and the hoofing of the brothers Nicholas is swift and ingenious. Its intermittent touches such as the small colored youngster who suddenly explodes into song with a surprising tenor, the bawdy badinage of Pearl Bailey and Fayard Nicholas, the picture of low saloon life in the St. Louis of another day, and the shrewd elliptical direction of several of its scenes are agreeable to contemplate. And so are the humorous flavor of the costuming, the lively rehandling of the old horse race business which has figured in musical shows for at least fifty years, the novel treatment of the bruiser's funeral services, and, above everything, the remarkable looks and prehensile grace of that mid-twentieth century Irene Bentley of her race, the aforesaid Miss Ruby Hill, hallelujah.

## CANDIDA. APRIL 3, 1946

*A revival of the comedy by George Bernard Shaw. Produced by Katharine Cornell in association with Gilbert Miller for 24 performances in the Cort Theatre.*

## PROGRAM

MISS PROSERPINE GARNETT	MR. BURGESS	<i>Cedric Hardwicke</i>
<i>Mildred Natwick</i>	CANDIDA	<i>Katharine Cornell</i>
JAMES MAVOR MORELL	EUGENE MARCEBANKS	
<i>Wesley Addy</i>		<i>Marlon Brando</i>
ALEXANDER MILL	<i>Oliver Cliff</i>	

SYNOPSIS: Act I. *A morning in October.* Act II. *Late afternoon, the same day.* Act III. *Late evening, the same day.*

Scene. *The sitting room in St. Dominic's parsonage in the north-east suburb of London.*

Director: *Guthrie McClintic.*

THE PLAY reminds us again that no important dramatist of our time has by nature been more sentimental than the Shaw who has pretended that he is not. He has contrived to hoodwink many through the simple trick of masking his sentiment in gaudy cerebral motley, and he has contrived with uncommon cunning. Thus thrown off guard and fooled, the many have mistaken what he has deeply felt for what he has lightly said. To beguile them with some certainty, he has combined his lightness with the hypnotism of shining words and then, with a Machiavellian craftsmanship, has turned the trick with finality by following up any possible remaining betrayal of emotion with a saucy comment on or criticism of it.

The stratagem is delectable in many of his plays but, while it has deluded others, it never has deluded Shaw himself. Only at intervals has he forgotten himself and his dramaturgical sleight-of-hand and without qualification carelessly exposed his secret heart. Much more often, as in even this *Candida*, of all his plays the most openly senti-



mental, the wile is plainly in evidence: Prossy's reaction to Marchbanks on love, the quips about onions in the passage between Candida and Marchbanks, etc. It is, in general and in short, one or another variation of the retort to the line, "Marriage is not a question of law, is it? Have you children no affection for one another? Surely, that's enough" in *Getting Married*: "If it's enough, why get married?"

Of all those who have played Candida, and their American number is at least a dozen, none has been more satisfactory than Katharine Cornell. The role is her oyster, and she serves it handsomely. It is exactly suited to her limitations as an actress. It provides her with a silver funnel for that cajoling voice of hers; it gives her body the opportunity to display its easy grace of movement; it supplies her with a shading of line and emotion that is within her range; it does not impose upon her problems which her resources might make it difficult for her to master. Shaw has been good to her, not only in this instance but in that of Jennifer in *The Doctor's Dilemma*, which by and large is simply Candida in mourning. Neither lovely role demands anything approaching the ultimate in acting; both are mainly and very deftly tailored to voice and manner. Given that quality of voice and manner, an actress of any standing at all would be hard put to it not to make an impression in the one or the other. . . . Women have failed as Candida, but not actresses.

I do not wish to appear to disparage Miss Cornell. In a certain kind of role there is no other actress on the American stage who is quite so pictorially and vocally effective, and none has more proudly held to the faith of the theatre. Some of the evenings we most fondly remember have been those in which she has had a share. But the critical fact remains that while she may, as her votaries claim, be the First Lady in our theatre, she is far from being the First Actress, or for that matter the second or third or fourth or even fifth. We must not, in our admiration and respect for her, forget that that theatre also contains Laurette Taylor and Helen Hayes, and Judith Anderson and Ethel

Barrymore, not to mention several others who are not exactly nincompoops in the acting craft.

I have observed before that Miss Cornell seems always, whatever her vehicle, to be playing the same role. In some cases, when the role has been cautiously chosen with an eye to her particular competences, she is all that might be desired. But when the role has been less cautiously selected, as in the demanding instance of Juliet or as in *Tiger Cats*, *Lucrece*, *Saint Joan*, *Herod And Mariamne*, and the concurrent *Antigone*, her elasticity is seen to be negligible, her range a minor one, and we find her still the Katharine Cornell of such lesser acting challenges as *The Outsider*, *The Green Hat*, *The Age of Innocence*, *Alien Corn*, *No Time For Comedy*, *The Barretts Of Wimpole Street*, *Lovers And Friends*, and this *Candida*.

There is certainly nothing to be held against an actress who, no matter how many plays she appears in, plays the roles in them much alike. That is, provided only the roles be themselves much alike and she play them (or perhaps more accurately it) well. When the roles are at bottom similar, Miss Cornell plays them as well as anyone could wish. It is when they depart the pattern that her limitations become obvious. In this regard she is a sister to such equally engaging actresses of past days as Maude Adams and Virginia Harned, both of whom were always, whatever they played, refreshing but who, like some others, were scarcely acceptable from the critical viewpoint when their roles were ever so slightly alien to their standardized histrionic persons.

It is and long has been a peculiarity of the public's taste, however, that it prefers certain of its favorite actresses to stick to a single kind of role and acting performance and not to disturb its pretty pictures of them by flying off and up into the higher and contrastful histrionic reaches. Maude Adams was accordingly close to her audiences' hearts when she was the Maude Adams of Barrie but far removed when she became the Maude Adams of the *Chanticleer* and *L'Aiglon* of Rostand. Virginia Harned was a public pet so long as she stuck to the heroines of Pinero

and Wilde and the equally candy-box heroine of *Trilby*, but not when she became the different creature of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. Margaret Illington delighted her fans when she appeared in the high-toned and dressy roles of such plays as *The Thief* and *His House In Order*, but not when she ventured into the slattern heroine's role in *Kindling*. And, among the other one-role actress favorites, Ina Claire in more recent years held her audiences' affection when she played the rompish lady in the drawing-room, but lost it when she made an excursion into such grimmer drama as *Our Betters*.

This latest revival of *Candida*, though it provides, as the comedy almost always does, an agreeable theatrical evening, is not nearly so good as that which Miss Cornell offered in 1942. Miss Cornell herself is quite as impressive as she was when first she played the role in 1924 and twice thereafter; her performance has not been let down. But, though Cedric Hardwicke as Burgess and Mildred Natwick once again as Prossy assist the occasion, the rest of the company, encouraged by Mr. McClintic's too pauseful and humdrum direction — surprising in recollection of his previous skill — drops the play's spirit. Hardwicke, it is to be granted, may be somewhat less *Candida's* parent as Shaw imagined him than Bruce Bairnsfather's — there are moments when one expects *Candida* to forget herself and address him as Old Bill — but his wonderful makeup and bag of character comedian tricks including everything from sucking at a hind tooth to hitching up his left eye and omitting only sawing a woman in two enlivens a stage that needs enlivening. While maybe not exactly in the right deck, Cedric is still a card. Wesley Addy's Morell, however, resolves itself largely into a mere recitation of the lines; if he has any personal inner credence it seldom gets lower than his larynx. Oliver Cliff is fair as Mill, but in the all-important role of Marchbanks, so ably handled in the earlier revival by Burgess Meredith, Marlon Brando's young poet's weakness becomes almost wholly a matter of weak acting. That Brando, who is a comparative novice, is not without potentialities is likely. But, with astute directors advising him,

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he will in time learn that consistency in character delineation does not necessarily call for a consistently monotonous manner of speech, that sensitiveness lies in more than a pale makeup and an occasionally quivering hand, and that a picture of physical weakness is better to be limned than by acting like a puppy ever in fear of a cat, as one of moral courage is better to be suggested than by staccato expectorations of one's opinions.

## WOMAN BITES DOG. APRIL 17, 1946

*A comedy by Bella and Samuel Spewack. Produced by Kermit Bloomgarden for 5 performances in the Belasco Theatre.*

### PROGRAM

AMANDA MERKLE	<i>Eda Heinemann</i>	HOPKINS	<i>Kirk Douglas</i>
TONY FLYNN	<i>Frank Lovejoy</i>	1ST ATTORNEY	<i>Richard Clark</i>
BETSY LOUIS ERIC	<i>Himself</i>	2ND ATTORNEY	<i>Arthur Russell</i>
COMMANDER SOUTHWORTH		SLIM	<i>Dudley Sadler</i>
	<i>Taylor Holmes</i>	WAITER	<i>Sam Bonnell</i>
SIMS	<i>E. G. Marshall</i>	VALET	<i>Russell Morrison</i>
WILSON	<i>Harold Grau</i>	BRECKENRIDGE	<i>Robert Le Sueur</i>
BETTY LORD		MAURICE CRASH	<i>Maury Tuckerman</i>
	<i>Mercedes McCambridge</i>	SOKONOVSKI	<i>Boris Kogan</i>
MAJOR SOUTHWORTH	<i>Royal Beal</i>	LEE	<i>John Shellie</i>
LIZZIE SOUTHWORTH		MAYOR STEVENS	<i>Ed Nannery</i>
	<i>Ann Shoemaker</i>	DEAN WEST	<i>Roger Quinlan</i>

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Office of the publisher of *The Herald*. Time. The present. An April morning. Act II. Living-room of Commander Southworth's suite at the Royal Hotel. That evening. Act III. Publisher's office. The next morning.

Director: Coby Ruskin.

**L**ABELED A COMEDY, the consignment seems rather to be an attempt at satirical farce and, since satirical farce is not one of the easiest things in the world to manage, the attempt remains just that. Though in *Boy Meets Girl* the authors were lucky to turn the trick with some aplomb, they failed badly in the case of another effort called *Clear All Wires*, which had to do, like the present exhibit, with matters journalistic and Russian.

The dramatic accomplishments of the couple, judging from their general record, do not seem to lie in the direction of happy satirical farce. *Solitaire Man*, which twenty years ago they presented as their first offering to the theatre, and *Poppa*, which followed two years later, scarcely suggested any humorous virtuosity and further were leavened with

a measure of sentimentality which, it will be allowed, is as suitable an infection in any aspiring writer of satirical farce as melancholia stuporosa. Their next contribution was *War Song*, which was more on the solemn side, and pretty hopeless; and subsequently in 1932 came the *Clear All Wires* mentioned. Two years later, in *Spring Song*, they unloaded such an abundance of tube-rose sentiment about a poor East Side family that even Max Gordon, who produced it, didn't wet an eye and, in view of a similar ocular aridity in the attending customers, hauled it away after a meagre run. *Boy Meets Girl* then caused everyone to think that there must be some big mistake. It didn't seem at all like the Spewacks. It was funny stuff and as surprising in the light of their damp earlier efforts as if Kaufman and Hart were suddenly to burst forth with something like *Rosmersholm*. But things returned to normal several seasons later with *Miss Swan Expects*, a strained and doleful comedy about doings in a publishing house, which expired after eight doomy performances.

All this, of course, is not to imply that it is foolish to expect writers of one kind of play suddenly to shift their gears and write a wholly different kind with some success. Theatrical history provides us with many such examples. In our own later theatre, one can off-hand think of at least eight or nine. Zoë Akins turned from a succession of plushy rhetorical plays to the bawdy comedy of *The Greeks Had A Word For It*. Elmer Rice jumped out of grisly courtrooms and tenements with *See Naples And Die* and *The Left Bank*. Eugene O'Neill, to the startle of everyone, after a long immersion in gloom produced in *Ah, Wilderness!* one of the best comedies of the American theatre. *Johnny Johnson* was a little flabbergasting coming from Paul Green, as after decades of melodrama, mystery jigsaws and suburban comedy was the lowering *Icebound* of Owen Davis; and surely no one looked for anything like *Pigeons And People* from George M. Cohan. After the amusing *Star-Spangled*, the long-faced *Thunder Rock* was the last thing anyone would have anticipated from Robert Ardrey, just as the meritorious drama, *Outrageous Fortune*, was the last in the instance

of Rose Franken, whose forte seemed to be more or less light comedy.

The point, in the case of the Spewacks, is rather that the main body of their work indicates small equipment for either satire or farce, and that, for all the seeming contradiction of *Boy Meets Girl*, which profited greatly from George Abbott's stage guidance, the cast of their minds and talents is not in those directions. In *Woman Bites Dog*, this becomes quite clear. There is a trace of ill-concealed venom in the play which, while not necessarily debilitating to satire, is certainly debilitating to farcical humor. For required reading in this connection, I constructively recommend to the authors the satirical farces of the late Charles H. Hoyt, among others.

This *Woman Bites Dog* which, despite a program note to the contrary, deals recognizably with the members of a well-known newspaper publishing family operating in Chicago, Washington and New York, has to do with a hoax put over on them, and on the Chicago member in particular, by a former serviceman who had read their journals abroad and found them to be politically distasteful. The hoax consists in inflaming the trio over the alleged usurpation of a small American city in the mid-West by Moscow-inspired local Communists, anathema to the trio and something even more than that to the Chicago end of the family. That a valid satirical farce might be written on the theme is entirely probable, but the authors have contrived not only nothing faintly approaching such a farce but, worse still, scarcely a play of any kind at all, save possibly an over-elaborated *Meet The People* or *Pins And Needles* sketch. Their first act tells their story. The rest of the evening is devoted simply to extended and monotonous comments on it, relieved only at double-spaced intervals by an amusing gag. Since, moreover, they let the cat out of the bag around nine-thirty, the audience readily anticipates everything that is going to happen thereafter and has little to occupy it except to muse how much better skilful writers might have handled the idea. These musings begin with the thought of the advantage that would have accrued to the exhibit if the

revelation of the hoax had been deferred until the second act, proceed to the advantage in eliminating the drawn-out, incorporated love story that would ruin almost any satirical farce, and end up at eleven o'clock with an infinitely more humorous conception of the play's ending. As that ending stands, the hoaxer sells the story of the Chicago publisher's embarrassment to *PM*. The real satirical belly-laugh would obviously have been to sell it exactly the same hoax.

The acting for the most part suggested that the company had been recruited from the Sells-Floto circus, with its stage direction handled by Frank Buck. The noise it made was at times so loud that one felt it must have rehearsed with a brass band, and around ten o'clock one was to be excused for anticipating the entrance of a herd of elephants, which under the circumstances would not have been such a bad idea. The direction further consisted in the notion that a telephone is identical with the puck in a hockey game and that the proper pronunciation of "history" is "histry," "object" "objict," "mathematics" "mathmatics," "surprise" "suprise," "ventriloquism" "ventrilquism," and "malingering" "malinggurring."



---

CALL ME MISTER. APRIL 18, 1946

*A revue with sketches by Arnold Auerbach and music and lyrics by Harold Rome. Produced by Melvyn Douglas and Herman Levin for a beyond the season's run in the National Theatre.*

## PRINCIPALS

Betty Garrett, Bill Callahan, Jules Munshin, Lawrence Winters, George Hall, Paula Bane, Alan Manson, Betty Lou Holland, George Irving, Harry Clark, Maria Karnilova, Danny Scholl, David Nillo, Glenn Turnbull, Evelyn Shaw, and Chandler Cowles.

Director: Robert H. Gordon.

---

THOUGH JULES MUNSHIN, its leading comedian, looks disturbingly like Zero Mostel and its scenery and costumes like something requisitioned from an R. H. Burnside road company, the revue, purveyed by former GI's, relievingly contains much material agreeable to the ear. This, of course, will come as a surprise to theatregoers who for some time now have resigned themselves to the conclusion that the ear is the last thing that producers of revues think of and consider everything all set after ordering 100,000 dollars worth of Donald Oenslager and Irene Sharaff, and a couple of tap dancers. The present producers have compromised on the couple of tap dancers, but otherwise have provided one with something to listen to beyond the usual sketch in which a man and woman in a bed twist an innocent situation into pretzels of *double entendre* and the other in which a man in an upper berth detects the presence of a woman in the lower, conducts himself for fifteen minutes like an epileptic acrobat in an effort to insinuate his corpus into it, and eventually discovers that the occupant is a fat colored lady.

In the stead of such medievalisms the revue dares to challenge tradition with a little originality. In place of the historic sketch involving the husband who comes home unexpectedly, finds three of his wife's lovers hiding under the

bed, and joins them in a game of pinochle, it offers a fresh and hilarious one lampooning the snooty elegance of the Army air corps. Instead of the time-honored item about the man who takes his wife to a fashionable restaurant, orders dinner and, upon getting a look at the check, grabs the tray from the waiter and plumps the latter down in his place, we are given one travestyng certain Southern senators who, studying a national survey of the people's opinion, are overjoyed to find that in the matter of public esteem and popularity they rate only a few points below athlete's foot. And instead of the familiar sketch involving the American in Paris who can't understand French and orders from the menu a dish that turns out to be the location of the men's lavatory we are comforted with a somewhat more dewy one about a perfectly normal soldier who returns to his home and is treated by his impressionable and solicitous family as if the war had converted him into everything from an acute psychoneurotic to a miscellaneous rapist.

Rome's lyrics, if not his music that accompanies them, are a further alleviation. In place of the worn set about the peccadilloes of café society, the ear is salved with an heroic ditty about various men who were ignominious jerks when they entered the Army and who, after going through the years of training, discipline and glorious battle, emerged as precisely the same ignominious jerks. Instead of the customary quippery about the Vanderbilts and Shuberts the song for a change has to do with a good neighbor plea to South America for God's sake to take back its rhumbas, congas and sambas and make the North American sacro-iliac safe for Democracy. And, while the stereotyped amorous croonings are not lacking, there is a least some relief in having one of them sung over a baby's crib with talcum powder sprinkled on the infant's bottom as an obbligate.

Better still, the shudderingly anticipated patriotic lyric note is quite as absent as it was in that best of all servicemen shows, *This Is The Army*. The feeling of country is promoted obliquely or humorously. It is sold not with flag and brag but in the homesickness of some such number as

"Going Home Train" with its sprawling doughboys singing in accompaniment to the rattle and roar of the cars that bear them homeward; in the dark loneliness implicit in such as "The Red Ball Express" with its Negro truck-driver describing the battle wagons moving through the night down the Normandy coast; and in the jocosity of such as "Surplus Blues" with its waitress out of an Army canteen bewailing her anatomical famishment since the boys have returned to civilian normalcy.

But do not get the idea that the show is all that good. A sufficient share of it adheres to the established pattern. Much the same old opening number with the chorus apprising the audience of the evening's contours is again in evidence. So are the love songs sung in the blue light. So is a ballet. So is the number in which a pert grandmother executes a lyric combining the names of the numerous New York department stores. So is the barbershop sketch with the customer being slapped with lather by the absent-minded barber and in mortal dread of the latter's flourished razor. So is the sketch about the housing shortage. And so are the tap dancers. Yet one nevertheless remains indebted to the better portions, particularly so in a day and age when the average revue is indistinguishable from a second-rate, old-time vaudeville show minus even such an inspiring attribute of the latter as the comic tumbling off the stage onto the bass drum.

Mention of the matter recalls the fact that the first comedian ever to fall off a stage onto a bass drum was one Mitch Kelly in the year 1857. Extensive and painstaking research has failed to provide me with the name of the show in which Mr. Kelly thus contributed to the sum of American culture, but it at least informs us that when he negotiated that phase of his art for the first time the audience mistook it for a mortal accident and rushed down to the orchestra pit to lend him succor.

How many comedians have since borrowed Mr. Kelly's act I can not for certain say, but the number must run into many hundreds. I myself in my own span of showgoing

have seen at least eighty or ninety. Time was when the artifice figured in every burlesque show and when it was a rare vaudeville bill that did not contain it. I recall one burlesque show, indeed, in which not only the Irish comic but the Dutch and Hebrew comics retailed the drollery, each one three times. And I similarly recollect a vaudeville bill on which a clown fell off the stage onto the drum six times and enriched his performance at its conclusion by falling off onto the drummer's head, toppling *him* off onto the drum.

For many years the act was one of the standbys in the amusement chambers, and until lately one encountered it in all its ancestral glory. It has at times suffered variations, such as falling onto the bass fiddle, the xylophone or the cornet player's lap. But it has not been long before it has gone back to first principles. Men may forget many of the things which in their earliest days of theatregoing rewarded them, yet among them there lives not one so dead that he doesn't remember himself as a small boy howling with mirth when some descendant of Kelly seemed to slip and, after wildly grabbing at the air, dejected himself with a resounding boom upon the membrane at the far right of the orchestra pit, with the membrane's professor thereupon going through the motions of having been hit by a two-ton cannon-ball.

Returning, after this educational sortie, to the subject in hand, one noted a tendency on the part of the majority of the reviewers courteously to gloss over the *révue's* emphatic weaknesses and to boost it in a manner hardly common to them. This, obviously, was because it is a servicemen's enterprise and because it was the proper, patriotic thing to do. Once again, as in the case of the Army flier show, *Winged Victory*, which was touted out of all proportion to its merits, one was accordingly brought to ponder the critical ethics that obtain in such circumstances. Critics, it seems to me, are hired on the score of their presumptive critical ability, not on the score of their patriotism and sentimental prejudices. If things were otherwise, even a *The*

*Girl From Nantucket* or a *The Duchess Misbehaves* might be expected to get rave notices if only the producers thereof bethought them to cast them with former GI's and Wacs.

The better performers in the revue are the earlier mentioned Munshin, despite his resemblance to Mostel, Betty Garrett, and Lawrence Winters, a Negro songster of some quality.

---

THIS, TOO, SHALL PASS. APRIL 30, 1946

*A play by Don Appell. Produced by Richard Krakeur and David Shay for a brief run in the Belasco Theatre.*

PROGRAM

JANET ALEXANDER	Jan Sterling	MAC SORRELL	Sam Wanamaker
MARTHA ALEXANDER		BUDDY ALEXANDER	Walter Starkey
	Kathryn Givney		
DR. STEVEN ALEXANDER			
	Ralph Morgan		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. *An afternoon early in June.* Act II. *One week later.* Act III. *Late the same evening.*

*The scene is the home of Dr. Steven Alexander in a small mid-western town at the present time.*

Director: Don Appell.

---

THIS, the season's concluding play, was still another manifestation of the plea drama, and quite as lubberly as the majority. Leaving the Negro for the moment, it devoted itself instead to the Jew, and talked its anti-prejudice and anti-bigotry theme to suffocation. It bore a basic resemblance to *A Young American*, shown earlier in the year, substituting a Jewish protagonist for the black man and centering the opposition in the character of the mother of the household into which he is brought as a guest. Of competent and fertile playwriting it indicated no seed, nor did the acting and stage direction contribute any conciliating illusion. It will always remain puzzling why such inferior goods are produced when plainly better plays on the same subject or subjects lie about for the asking. Schnitzler's *Professor Bernhardt*, in this specific instance, is just one such.

The defect in most of these plea dramas is that they are nine parts plea to one part drama. They lecture to the drama the story which the drama itself should tell, and the latter slowly and duly expires of an ear-ache complicated with pernicious anemia. They are, in short, for the greater part just so many passionate dramaturgical robots with their mouths constantly wide open.



## *Especially Interesting Performances*

DEEP ARE THE ROOTS

*Barbara Bel Geddes*

THE ASSASSIN

*Clay Clement*

*Harold Huber*

*Lesley Woods*

THE NEXT HALF-  
HOUR

*Conrad Janis*

THE RICH, FULL LIFE

*Virginia Weidler*

THE RUGGED PATH

*Spencer Tracy*

STATE OF THE UNION

*Minor Watson*

A SOUND OF HUNTING

*Sam Levene*

*George Tyne*

*Burton Lancaster*

*Carl Frank*

THE DAY BEFORE  
SPRING

*Irene Manning*

THE MERMAIDS  
SINGING

*Beatrice Pearson*

STRANGE FRUIT

*Juano Hernandez*

THE FRENCH TOUCH

*John Wengraf*

HAMLET

*Maurice Evans*

DREAM GIRL

*Betty Field*

*Edmon Ryan*

BILLION DOLLAR  
BABY

*Mitzi Green*

SHOW BOAT

*Charles Fredericks*

*Kenneth Spencer*

*Jan Clayton*

*Carol Bruce*

THE WOULD-BE  
GENTLEMAN

*Bobby Clark*

O MISTRESS MINE

*Alfred Lunt*

BORN YESTERDAY

*Judy Holliday*

*Paul Douglas*

*Gary Merrill*

ANTIGONE

*Cedric Hardwicke*

JEB

*Ossie Davis*

TRUCKLINE CAFÉ

*Marlon Brando*



HE WHO GETS  
SLAPPED  
*Reinhold Schunzel*

I LIKE IT HERE  
*Oscar Karlweis*

THE SONG OF  
BERNADETTE  
*Elizabeth Ross*

ST. LOUIS WOMAN  
*Ruby Hill*

CANDIDA  
*Cedric Hardwicke*

CALL ME MISTER  
*Jules Munshin*

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